THE LIFE (AND MYSTERIOUS DEATH) OF CANADA'S FIRST VC RECIPIENT

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING MILITARY MONTHLY

BRITAIN AT WAR

ISSUE
219

FALLEN LIONS

The elite rugby players who gave their all on the pitch and the battlefield

SINCE 1888

THE PATHFINDERS' MASTER BOMBER

How the RAF's forgotten 'flying tramp' came to be in a class of his own

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From scrap bait to GLOBAL ASSET

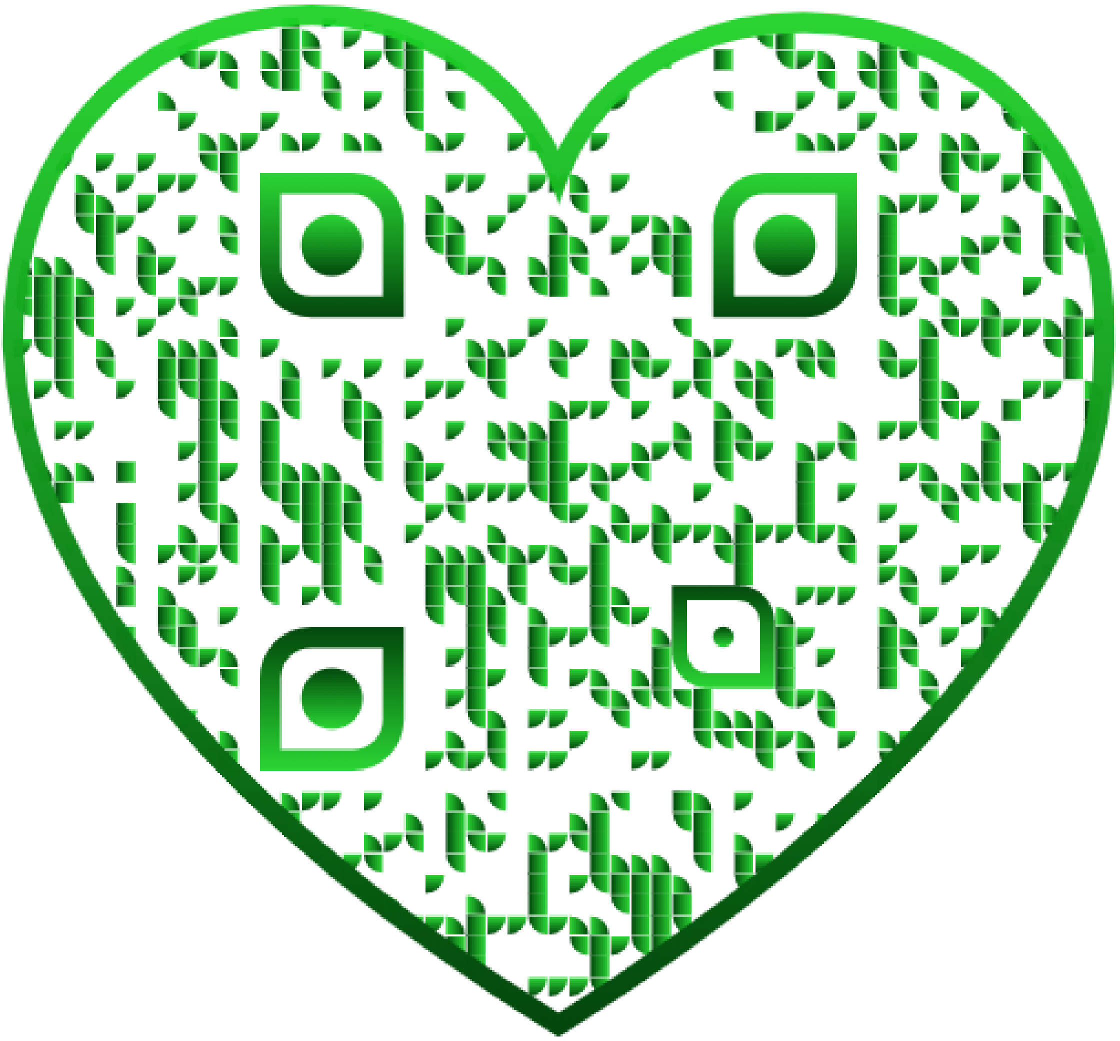
How Britain's disposable giants became the world's aircraft carriers of choice

Chieftain's brew

The add-on armour that could have stopped the Red Army

Double whammy

The day HMS *Javelin* ate two torpedoes and asked for more



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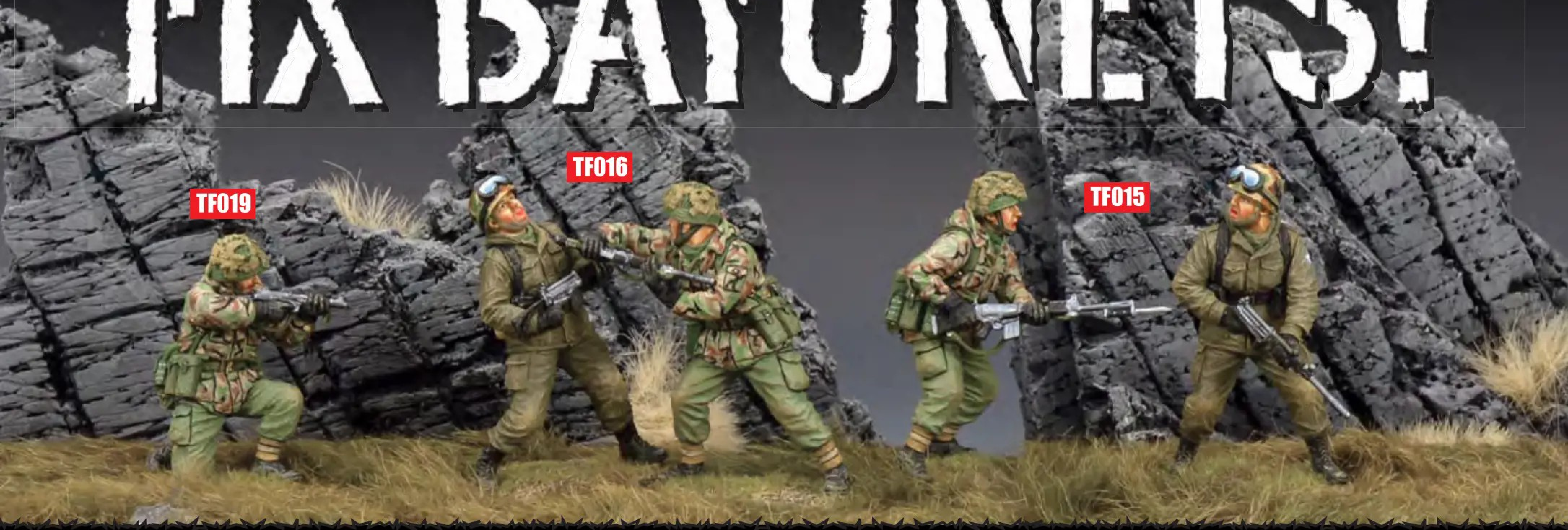

ON the evening of 11 June 1982, the men of *3 PARA* began a night assault on strong elements of the Argentine *7th Infantry Regiment* defending Mount Longdon on East Falkland.

This was one of three battles in a Brigade-size attack along with Royal Marine assaults on nearby *Mount Harriet* and *Two Sisters*.

All of the British units involved were highly experienced in night fighting and hand-to-hand combat, in addition, they had strong artillery support.

After eight hours of often vicious close-quarter battle the men of *3 PARA* captured Mount Longdon at a cost of *18* paratroopers killed and *40* wounded. Argentine casualties amounted to *50* killed and about *120* wounded with another *50* captured.

PARAS, MARINES & PENGUINS

King & Country's latest *'FALKLANDS WAR'* figures include the following:

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TF019 *'Para w/Sterling SMG'* This kneeling British paratrooper aims his ***SMG*** *(Sterling Submachine Gun)* at the enemy.

TF017 *'Time For Some Scran and A Wet'* Two ***'Bootnecks'*** take a brief break from *'yomping'* across East Falkland to enjoy some hot food and a hot drink.

TF018 *"What Are You Lookin' At?"* A tired and weary Royal Marine enjoys a short halt while meeting one of the Falkland's natural residents.

TF021 *'The Original Falkland Islanders'* This cute little trio of ***King Penguins*** and their ancestors settled on the Falklands long before Britain and Argentina laid claim to these cold, windswept islands.

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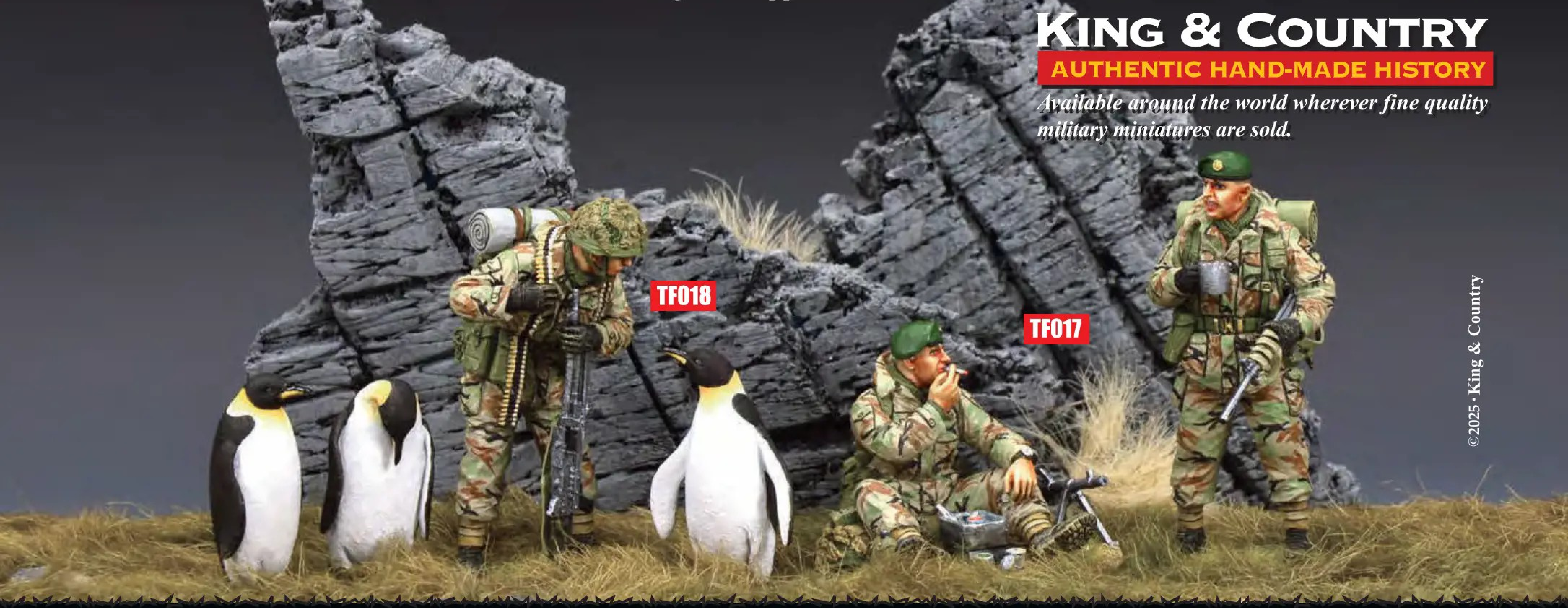

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From the Editor

The Colossus-class carrier HMS *Glory* – one of the 1942 Design Light Fleet carriers –returning to Portsmouth following a tour of the Mediterranean and the Far East in 1950 TOPFOTO

I think we have a bit of everything in this issue: heroism, sacrifice, murder, a mysterious death, incredible luck and a bit of scientific boffinry to boot.

Let's start at the top, as we fly a few sorties with a Pathfinder legend. There are many famous wartime RAF servicemen with vibrant and deserving reputations, but one name that's curiously absent from the list is Alec Cranswick, who, at the time of his death, had probably logged more operational sorties than any other Bomber Command pilot. A highly experienced, capable airman, Cranswick was a little more down-to-earth than some of his compatriots, but no less gallant, nor less worthy of praise. Sean Feast highlights the career of an incredible warrior.

Andrew Thomas brings both triumph and tragedy with his recounting of Britain's last aerial combat of World War Two. On August 15, 1945 – the day Imperial Japan gave up the fight – Fleet Air Arm Seafires were locked in a dogfight over Japanese soil. The result was nothing less than decisive, but this last victory was marred by murder, with one downed aviator shot hours after his captors had been told the war was over.

Those Seafires were, of course, flying from aircraft carriers. Even as the war ended, several new carriers were en route to the Pacific. I profile the 1942 Design Light Fleet carriers, two classes of 'disposable' carriers constructed as part of an ambitious wartime programme and only intended to last three years. As you'll discover, these versatile ships served for much, much longer, in no fewer than eight navies.

The infamous Charge of the Light Brigade led to the award of multiple Victoria Crosses, one of which went to Alexander Dunn. That made Dunn not only among the earliest recipients of the medal, but also Canada's first VC awardee. However, as Alex Zakrzewski discovers, the Canadian hero of 'Hell's Mile' was a man of great means and had something of a chequered career defined by social taboos. All this makes his early death somewhat suspicious... and possibly unscrupulous!

In addition to being one of those historical curiosities we are so fond of, something special about Dunn's story is that it has enabled us to use photographs taken by Roger Fenton. One of the first war photographers, Fenton went to Crimea and embedded himself within the Allied armies, taking hundreds of photographs and processing them in his mobile studio wagon. Among the scenes captured is of a group of survivors of from the ill-fated charge. The clarity and depth on display is quite staggering, especially considering it was taken on campaign in October 1854. Maybe the story of Fenton and the pioneering men – and later women – like him should appear in these pages in the near future?

It's an exciting time for fans of rugby, with the Lions tour of Australia underway. Even my Springbok-loving South African colleague is stoked and hopeful for a Lions series win. Almost 900 players have received the prestigious call up to the invitational team and a number of Lions had impressive later careers, becoming doctors, civil servants and successful businessmen, with some having royal links – one even sat in judgment of the Kray twins. However, many Lions players had military careers, with a substantial number reaching high rank and/or receiving decorations for gallantry and at least one serving in the SAS. Officially, 14 Lions were killed in the world wars, but, as I discovered, this number may be quite a bit larger.

There's more, but page space is finite. Let's end on that boffinry I mentioned earlier… In the 1980s, additional armour packages were developed for Britain's Chieftain tank. Brought into service as NATO's most powerful tank, combat experience in the Iran-Iraq War showed that it was increasingly falling behind. Great effort was undertaken to improve the Chieftain's survivability and Ed Webster charts the development of the Stillbrew package and asks how effective these composite blocks might have been.

John Ash, Editor

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Squadron Leader Alec Cranswick has not enjoyed the fame of other RAF legends – something that greatly annoyed Pathfinder chief Donald Bennett. Sean Feast profiles the supreme effort by an aviator who saw his bombs as a necessary evil

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Last Dunkirk veteran dies aged 105

Believed to be the last British-born Dunkirk veteran, Duncan McInnes BEM, died just days before the 85th anniversary of 1940's Operation Dynamo.

'Mac' McInnes was a leading telegraphist in the destroyer *Saladin* during the Dunkirk evacuation. Operation Dynamo saw 338,000 British and Allied troops lifted from Dunkirk's beaches and harbour between May 27–June 4, 1940. *Saladin*, one of 67 S-class destroyers ordered in 1917, and one of 11 to serve in World War Two, made seven trips to Dunkirk and was badly damaged.

Mac was born on February 1, 1920, in Gosport and joined the Royal Navy in 1935, aged 15. He later wrote about Dunkirk in his memoir *From Spark Transmitters and Crystal Set Receivers to Satellite and The Web*: "We could see columns of smoke coming out of the town, and the beaches were black with troops. There was a jetty, and we managed to get close to it and finally tie up to it, immediately we embarked waiting soldiers who [looked] a sorry bunch.

"I could only see them from the door of the wireless room. It appeared the most popular one on board was the cook, who provided the soldiers with hot mugs of sweet tea – probably the first drink that they had had in days. Then it was full speed to Dover to disembark and back again into the turmoil of the beaches."

He recalled the close shave *Saladin* survived during the evacuation: "We felt the ship slow almost to a stop, and, opening the door of the office, I saw the engineer officer rushing to inform the captain of the damage to the engine room and our maximum speed [had] dropped from 30kts to about four. I transmitted this information to HQ, which instructed us to disengage and to proceed at best speed to Portsmouth... It was only when we docked that I discovered we had suffered some 30 casualties.

"We were given leave, and I was able to see my wife and family, and I remember it well, as it was the first time I had ever sworn in front of my mother – when I was describing how this 'f**king German bomber nearly straddled the ship with his bombs."

Mac retired from the navy in 1960, working for Pye Telecommunications Ltd before finding a new role in the British Army as a civilian foreman of signals. Latterly, he worked for BFBS to create a TV service for the British military community in Germany before he moved to Australia. In 2019, he returned to Britain to attend an Association of Dunkirk Little Ships veterans' cruise.

Commenting on Duncan McInne's passing ahead of this year's commemorative crossing to Dunkirk (see opposite), Ian Gilbert, Honorary Vice Admiral, Association of Dunkirk Little Ships, said: "This will be the first time we've gone over when there are no veterans. The little ships are the veterans because the living link has now gone – we have to keep these boats alive to keep the memory alive."

Cadets recreate Magister majesty

The recreated wartime photograph
LONDON LUTON AIRPORT

Cadets from 10F Luton Squadron ATC gathered at London Luton Airport to recreate a wartime photograph.

The original shows six cadets lined up alongside a Miles Magister trainer, with a seventh on the wing and an eighth in the cockpit, as an instructor speaks to them. The photograph was recreated in May when easyJet pilot Scott Butler flew the Shuttleworth Collection's preserved Magister to Luton as part of the recent VE Day celebrations.

Butler, a former RAF pilot and cadet who volunteers at Shuttleworth, told the BBC's Neve Gordon-Farleigh: "The 'Maggie' has many links for me, [and] we were thrilled the cadets were all as enthusiastic about the aircraft as their predecessors from all those years ago." Cadet Charlemagne Kirk said: "We all feel immensely privileged to have been invited to get a close look at a working Miles Magister... and [to] recreate such an important moment." Neil Thompson, chief operations officer at London Luton Airport, added: "We are proud of the airport's past and it was an honour to have this opportunity to pay tribute to the Second World War generation."

Sikh soldier dies at 103

Dhatt in recent times ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

One of the last Sikhs to fight for Britain and the Commonwealth in World War Two died, aged 103, in May.

Havildar-Major Rajinder Dhatt – who last year received the MBE from King Charles III in recognition of his services to the South Asian community – was born in Punjab on October 21, 1941. He joined the British-Indian Army in 1941 and as well as serving as an instructor and storekeeper, deployed to the Far East where he was involved in the Battle of Kohima, a seminal 1944 victory in the campaign in Burma.

He retired from the Indian Army post-Partition at the rank of Havildar-Major, and in 1963 moved to Hounslow, London. He later co-founded the Undivided Indian Ex-Servicemen's Association to unite British-Indian veterans.

Announcing Dhatt's death, Tej Pal Singh Ralmill, of the Sikh Pioneers and Sikh Light Infantry Association, wrote: "A life of service and duty ends after 103 years. The last of the wartime generation whose immeasurable contribution to humanity will never be forgotten." He added: "Dhatt will be remembered for raising awareness of the contribution and sacrifice of the 2,500,000-strong undivided Indian Army during the Second World War."

Of the estimated 500,000 Sikhs who fought in World War Two, the number surviving today is believed to be small. The Royal British Legion said: "We are deeply grateful for Rajindar's contributions to the Royal British Legion's work in supporting the Armed Forces community. His life and legacy serve as a poignant reminder of the invaluable sacrifices made by those who served from across the Commonwealth."

Dhatt as a training instructor NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM

Scottish first for Royal Navy sailors

Royal Navy personnel have formed the ceremonial guard at Edinburgh Castle and the Palace of Holyroodhouse for first time in the service's history. Between May 16-22, more than 100 sailors took the place of The Royal Regiment of Scotland which traditionally guards the castle and royal residence.

The sailors marched during the arrival parade at Holyroodhouse, welcoming the Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Lady Elish Angiolini, to Edinburgh for the Ceremony of the Keys, after which the naval contingent remained on guard. The contingent had spent three days completing intensive rehearsals alongside Army comrades at Redford Barracks to ensure they understood the intricate routines and movements, before a full-dress rehearsal

Sailors on the march in a historic first for the Royal Navy and for Scotland ROYAL NAVY/MOD

The Royal Navy's State Ceremonial Training Officer, Warrant Officer 1, Glynn Moffat, said: "It is a tremendous privilege and honour for the Royal Navy to be granted the unique opportunity, for the first time in history, to mount the ceremonial guard at both Edinburgh Castle and the Palace of Holyroodhouse. These men and women, having so proudly represented the Royal Navy during the recent VE Day commemorations, now carry that same sense of duty and pride into the heart of Edinburgh.

"As someone who served aboard HMS *Edinburgh* and had the honour of marching her ship's company up The Royal Mile when we were granted the Freedom of the City in 2013, it's incredibly special to return under such historic circumstances."

Dynamo miracle recreated

Marking the 85th anniversary of the Dunkirk evacuation, the Association of Dunkirk Little Ships arranged what it calls the largest gathering of its vessels since the original Operation Dynamo in 1940. More than 70 vessels – including Thames barges, fishing vessels, yachts and pleasure cruisers that all participated in the evacuation – reprised the journey by sailing from Ramsgate to Dunkirk. The vessels were escorted by P2000 patrol vessels of the RN Coastal Forces Squadron while lifeboats and spectator craft joined the motley assembly. A week of events began at Ramsgate on May 20, including a visit from HRH Prince Michael of Kent, C-in-C Maritime Reserves, before the flotilla crossed the channel, returning a week later. LPHOT EDWARD JONES/MOD

Marine becomes RN boss in historic first

A Royal Marine has been appointed First Sea Lord, the overall commander of the Royal Navy, for the first time in the Senior Service's history.

General Sir Gwyn Jenkins was first commissioned as an officer in 1990 and has led 3 Commando and the SBS, as well as fulfilling command roles in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2012, he became Military Assistant to Prime Minister David Cameron and then moved into a top-level position serving as a Deputy National Security Adviser to the Cabinet Office. After leading 3 Commando, he worked as Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff between 2019-21 and was promoted to full general in 2022. He has also served as the Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff. Since 2024, he has served as Strategic Advisor to the Secretary of State for Defence, John Healey, and was heavily involved in negotiating the Anglo-German defence co-operation pact signed last October, as well as the UK-Norway strategic defence partnership, about which discussions began in the spring.

The position of First Sea Lord has existed in one name or another since 1689. Prior to Sir Gwyn's appointment, the all-time highest ranked Royal Marine was Commandant General, the professional head of the force, a role also filled, at time of writing, by Jenkins.

Sir Gwyn was formally appointed as First Sea Lord during a supersession ceremony in HMS *Victory*'s Great Cabin on May 27. With the ongoing transformation of the Royal Marines, a major shake-up in amphibious capability, shortages of crews and hulls, the need to introduce new classes of warfighting and support vessels, and incorporating increasing technologies into ships – as well as scrutiny into the actions of special forces units in Afghanistan – the Navy's new boss has a busy tenure ahead.

Sir Gwyn commented: "Leading the incredible sailors, marines and civil servants of the Royal Navy is a true privilege. I have always been driven by our mission to keep the UK safe – now more than ever we must strengthen our combat readiness, modernise faster and shape the Navy our country needs."

General Sir Gwyn Jenkins inspecting his first parade as Commandant General Royal Marines in November 2022 LPHOT MARK JOHNSON/MOD

'Secret' tunnels to house military intelligence exhibition

A network of once-secret wartime tunnels beneath London are to showcase the history of Britain's military intelligence services.

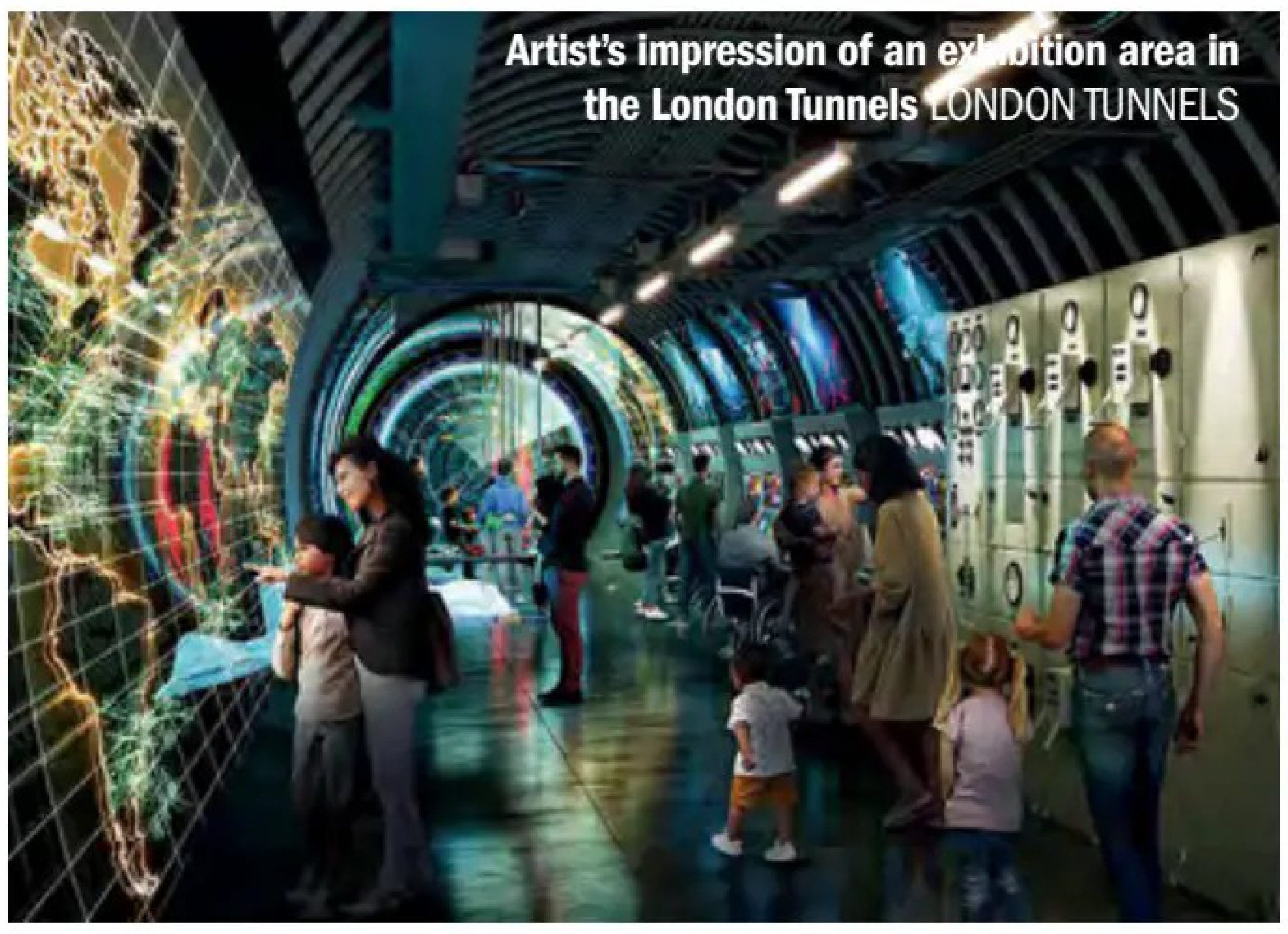
As part of plans to open the Kingsway Exchange Tunnels (see *BAW*, April 2024), London Tunnels has announced it has entered into a collaboration with the Military Intelligence Museum to display part of its collection on a permanent basis.

The exhibition will highlight the history of military intelligence and the use of the tunnels, displaying original artefacts, equipment and documents within a modern, high-tech experience. Stories from the Battle of Britain and D-Day will feature alongside extraordinary espionage operations during the Cold War, the 1982 Falklands Conflict and 21st century peacekeeping missions.

A special exhibition will be dedicated to the Special Operations Executive, which breifly used the tunnels in 1945.

The Kingsway Exchange Tunnels were built under High Holborn in 1942 to shelter civilians. They were then occupied for military use and later by British Telecom. In 2023, they were acquired by the London Tunnels private equity fund, which plans to open them by 2027.

General Sir Jim Hockenhull KBE, ADC, Commander of Strategic Command and Colonel Commandant of the Intelligence Corps, said the exhibition would be "the world's most authoritative permanent exhibition devoted to military intelligence."



Artist's impression of an exhibition area in the London Tunnels LONDON TUNNELS

Royal Navy averts cat-astrophe

If you were touched by our recent shaggy dog story in which members of the Royal Artillery rehomed stray dogs from Romania (*BAW*, April 2025), how about a nine-lives narrative? A group of Royal Navy sailors in Bahrain found the plight of orphaned kittens litter-ly impossible to ignore.

Personnel serving at the UK Naval Support Facility in the island kingdom, which provides support to Royal Navy warships operating in the Red Sea, the Gulf and the Indian Ocean, heard the cries of five kittens beneath a shipping container and, when they investigated, the quintet ran to them in search of food. Believed to be just three-weeks old, the sailors took the felines in and hand-reared them, saving them from certain death in Bahrain's 40°C heat. The cats' mother, known to base personnel as Michelle, had died, leaving her offspring to fend for themselves. One of the kittens did not survive, but the remaining four have been nursed back to health.

Unfortunately, no Royal Navy warships in the region have received a new ship's cat – that practice having ended in 1975 – so the moggies were rehomed locally.

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6th - 11th September 2025 Simon Jones

Mons and Le Cateau

This tour focuses on both the first fights and high-command issues involving the British in August 1914: Mons, the subsequent retreat, the stands at Le Cateau and Landrecies and the contradictory strategic options.

31st August - 3rd September 2025 Simon Jones

Anzio & Cassino 1944

After the bloodbath of Salerno and then the torture of the Volturno crossings, the US and British troops of Mark Clark's 5th Army had to deal with the Axis Forces on the so-called Winter Line.

15th - 21st September 2025 Colonel David Harrison

Discovering the Western Front

The battlefields of the Somme and Ypres saw the shedding of the blood of almost one million British and Commonwealth soldiers during the First World War. Their names are synonymous with the horrors and sufferings of that conflict and the size of the monuments to the Missing.

4th - 8th August 2025 Dr Bruce Cherry

The End in Italy

As Rome became the first Axis capital to fall in June 1944, the Germans pulled back towards the north, first delaying the 5th and 8th Armies either side of Florence before scuttling into their bunkers and tank turrets from Pesaro to Pietrasanta.

23rd - 29th September 2025 Colonel David Harrison

Operation Mercury

The fascinating story of a high-risk operation fought across a stunning Mediterranean landscape. Crete has to be one of the most beautiful Greek islands, and some would argue that there is no other place like it.

30th September - 6th October 2025 Colonel Bob Kershaw

Fortress Malta

Malta's history is shaped by successive incomers: ancient Phoenicians, Romans and Arabians, the Knights of St John, Napoleon and the British.The Second World War siege will be our main focus, but we also examine the indelible marks that other cultures and events have left behind.

5th - 12th November 2025 Major General Ashley Truluck

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Members of the Home Guard stand guard at Whitehall, June 1941. The LDV (later Home Guard) guarded key sites, as shown here, as well as being expected to support ground forces in the event of an invasion OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

The United Kingdom should re-form the Home Guard to protect critical national infrastructure as the government seeks to bolster defence, recommends the 2025 Strategic Defence Review, published on June 2. The notion had been widely reported prior to the SDR's release.

Overall, there are winners and losers, and some recommendations are situational. For example, a small expansion of army strength – having last year fallen below 70,000 personnel for the first time since 1793 – is now not expected to be confirmed until the next Parliament.

The review proposes some 60 recommendations to enhance lethality via new technologies and force multipliers. A key part of the plans is the potential acquisition of F-35A Lightning multi-role strike aircraft to carry the B61 variable-yield thermonuclear bomb, restoring the RAF's nuclear deterrence capability for the first time since 1998.

One focus of the review is to integrate technologies to reduce manpower requirements elsewhere, so that frontline strength is bolstered. The SDR has proposed the creation of an all-volunteer defence force to ensure "the protection of key sites such as for energy, food, water, telecoms, medical supplies and transport infrastructure... increasing resilience and strategic depth by ensuring Regulars and Reserves can concentrate on warfighting, not basic tasks."

The force is to be modelled on the Army Reserves, but kept separate from that organisation. Several thousand volunteers are expected to be needed to fill regional hubs, with personnel "recruited and employed locally." It is understood they will be "armed and equipped with basic communications, weapons and technology such as drones," but the terms of service and parameters for training and deployment remain unclear, with only "a narrowly defined remit and training commitment" confirmed so far.

During World War Two, 1,500,000 individuals joined the Home Guard, a well-trained and (eventually) well-equipped home defence force scattered across the UK. In addition to providing organised resistance in the face of a Nazi invasion, the Home Guard also guarded core infrastructure and sensitive sites from paratroop attack, espionage and sabotage.

A modern civilian force, working in conjunction with the emergency services, would be expected to safeguard sites from terrorist activity and other threats, including sabotage or drone attacks directed by a peer adversary such as Russia, but also by non-state actors or other groups with diverse motivations. Several nations, including Denmark, Germany and Sweden, maintain such forces, but Britain has not maintained a Home Guard-style unit since the early 2000s.

After World War Two, the Home Guard was revived in the 1950s, but was shortlived. Similarly, a large Civil Defence Corps operated between 1949-1968, tasked with taking control of an affected area in a major national emergency. In the 1980s, the Home Service Force was created to provided platoon-sized units of ex-service personnel to support the defence of key installations, but it was disbanded at the end of the Cold War. The concept was revived in 2000 as the Civil Contingencies Reaction Force, but this was scrapped in 2009.

Questions linger about how to select, train, integrate, accommodate, mobilise and deploy a new Home Guard, but the SDR has concluded that "the government must have the necessary plans, powers and personnel to achieve an effective and sustainable transition to war if required."

Hand-cranked hullabaloo

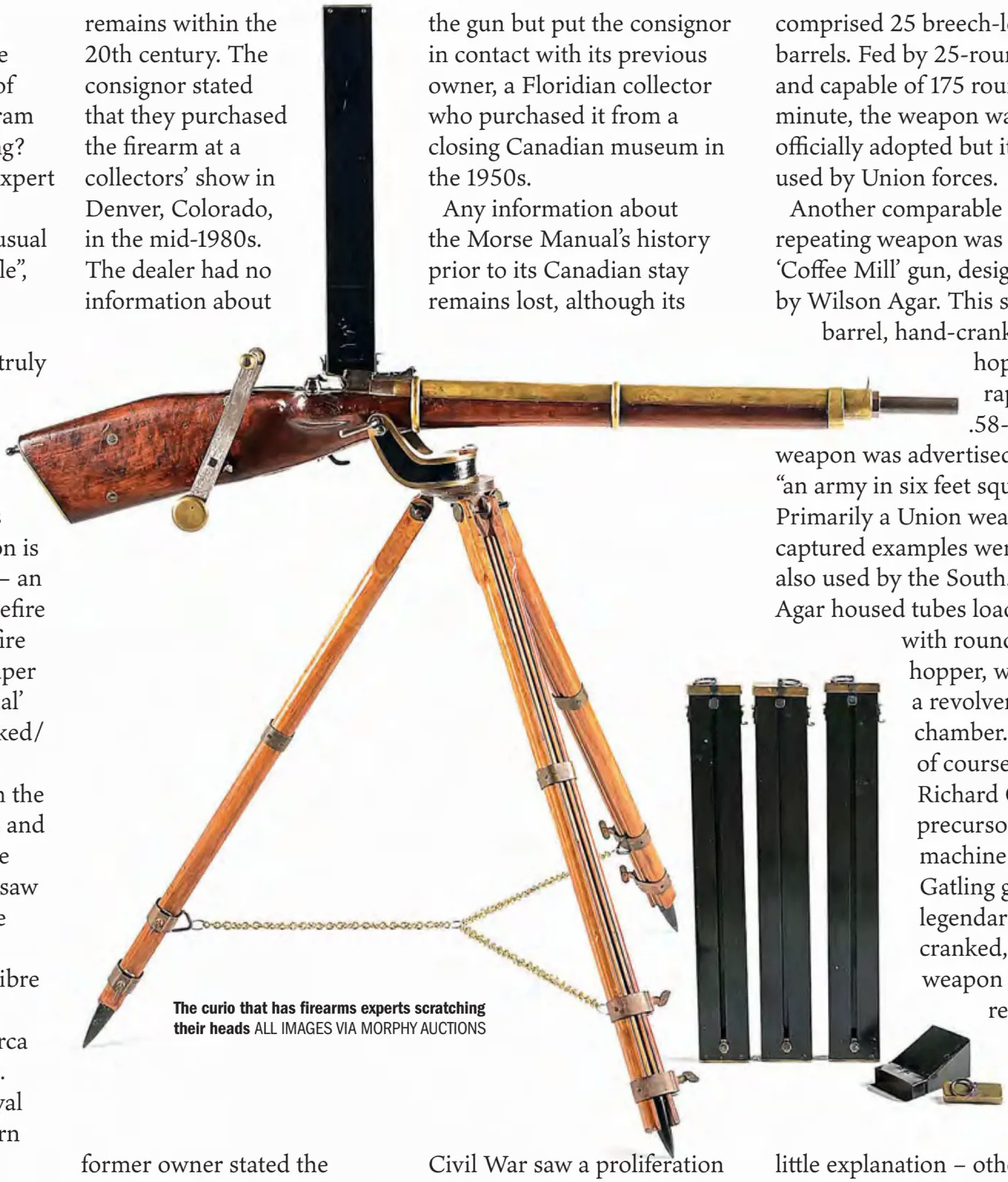
The emergence of a possibly unique British precursor to the machine gun has caused a stir among firearms historians. **John Ash** reports

Could a rare British repeating rifle have inspired the likes of machine gun pioneers Hiram Maxim and John Browning? Renowned machine gun expert Dolf Goldsmith thinks so.

Described as a "very unusual and unique crank-fired rifle", the weapon now labelled as the British .58 Morse Manual machine gun is a truly forgotten weapon – with its original name lost to history, along with any knowledge of its designer. The name 'Morse' derives from the round the weapon is chambered in, .58 Morse – an early self-contained, centrefire cartridge (but it can also fire .557 Snider steel-based paper cartridges) – while 'Manual' comes from its hand-cracked/crank-fire action. The .58 Morse round originated in the 1850s in the United States and a limited number of Morse Carbines chambered in it saw Confederate Service in the American Civil War.

Although its primary calibre is American, the Morse Manual is British-built, circa the late 1850s-early 1860s. Former curator of the Royal Small Arms Factory Pattern Room, the late Herbert Woodend, completed a series of tests on the gun to confirm its barrel was a one-off Enfield design, while other components feature British Crown proof marks.

Although the weapon has discovered new-found prominence, it was not a completely unknown quantity – though knowledge of its existence was limited and the known history of the gun remains within the 20th century. The consignor stated that they purchased the firearm at a collectors' show in Denver, Colorado, in the mid-1980s. The dealer had no information about the gun but put the consignor in contact with its previous owner, a Floridian collector who purchased it from a closing Canadian museum in the 1950s.

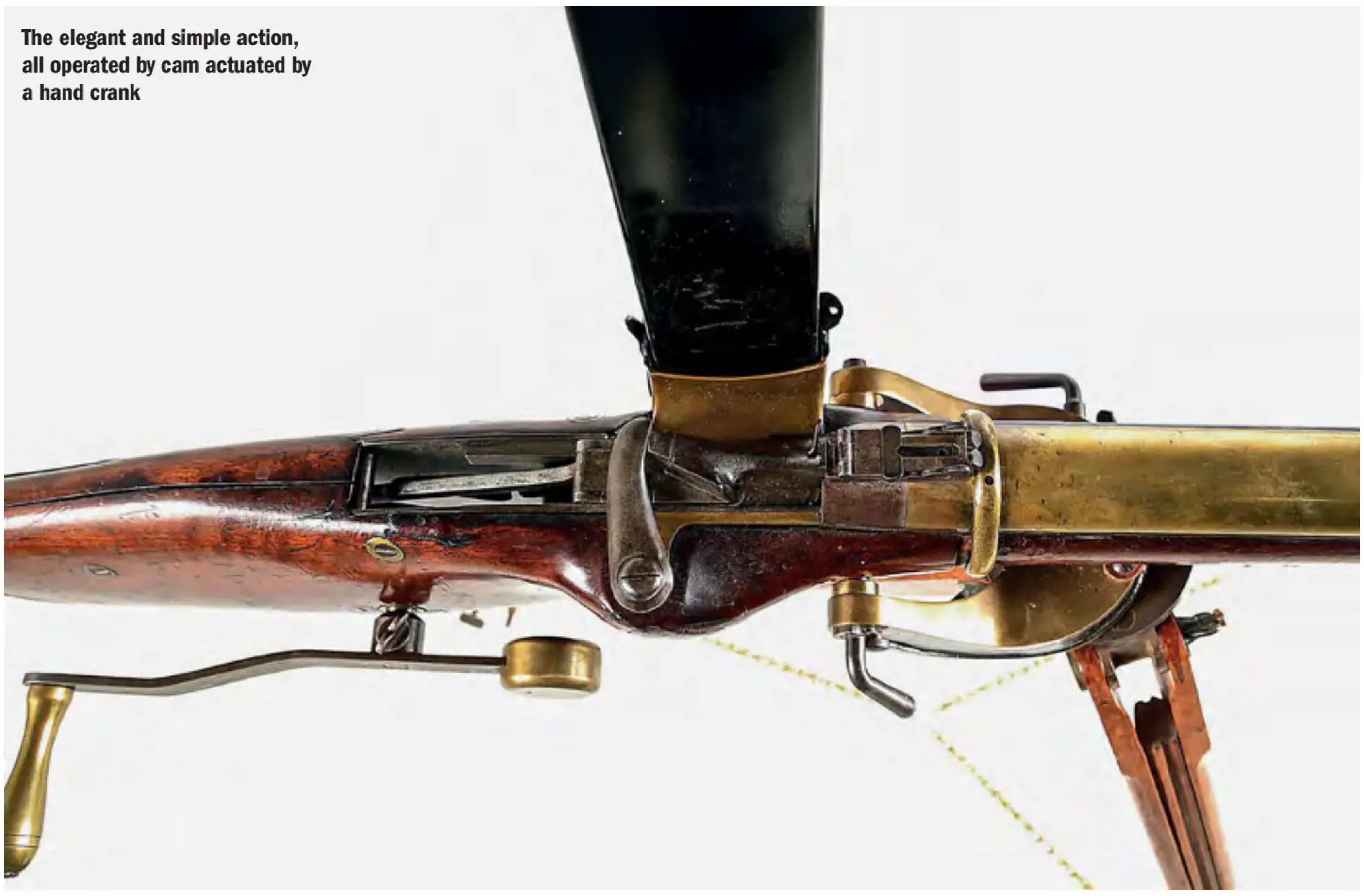

The curio that has firearms experts scratching their heads ALL IMAGES VIA MORPHY AUCTIONS

Any information about the Morse Manual's history prior to its Canadian stay remains lost, although its former owner stated the museum had a plaque (since lost) that stated the gun was "Confederate Gun for Bridge Defense". While speculative, the use of the Morse Manual by the Confederates would be plausible. The American Civil War saw a proliferation of early rapid-firing guns used to defend key positions such as bridges. Designs included the Billinghurst Requa Battery, a crew-served, volley gun designed by dentist Dr Josephus Requa that comprised 25 breech-loading barrels. Fed by 25-round strips and capable of 175 rounds per minute, the weapon was never officially adopted but it was used by Union forces.

Another comparable repeating weapon was the Agar 'Coffee Mill' gun, designed by Wilson Agar. This single-barrel, hand-cranked, hopper-fed, rapid-fire, .58-calibre weapon was advertised as "an army in six feet square". Primarily a Union weapon, captured examples were also used by the South. The Agar housed tubes loaded with rounds in a hopper, which fed a revolver-style chamber. Then of course came Richard Gatling's precursor machine gun; the Gatling gun, a legendary, hand-cranked, rotary weapon that requires little explanation – other than that it was very influential.

The possible presence of the British gun on a Civil War battlefield is no great leap. British arms flowed into North America – the Pattern 1953 Enfield rifle-musket

Side view of the Morse Manual, showing the mystery bar and the stabilised crack



The elegant and simple action, all operated by cam actuated by a hand crank

for example was the second most widely used infantry weapon in the conflict – and those wanting to field test and supply novel new weapons participated in such activity. However, the obscurity of the Morse Manual, plus its minimal history, would suggest it was not a success.

Nevertheless, the Morse Manual appears to have been an influential firearm. With both the Gatling and the Agar being 1861 designs, is there a remote possibility the Morse Manual predates them, as they all share common features? Probably unlikely, as it depends on the British weapon being available for evaluation in the United States before the civil war – but it can't be ruled out. However, the Morse Manual has still been labelled as a precursor to the Gatling gun, Hotchkiss Revolving Cannon, and subsequent mechanically operated repeating weapons such as the Anglo-Swedish Nordenfelt and Americna-designed Gardner.

The Morse Manual's action is mechanically simple, but elegant. The weapon utilises a detachable crank to actuate the bolt and re-cock the V spring-powered hammer, loading new rounds from gravity-fed, top-loading box magazines similar to the Gatling design (a funnel/hopper may also be used). The mechanism is housed between two steel sideplates, and the wooden stock fits tightly around the outside. Both Goldsmith and Woodend agreed that the Morse Manual was the first gun either had observed that used a trunnion and sideplates in its construction, making the weapon a significant one from a developmental standpoint.

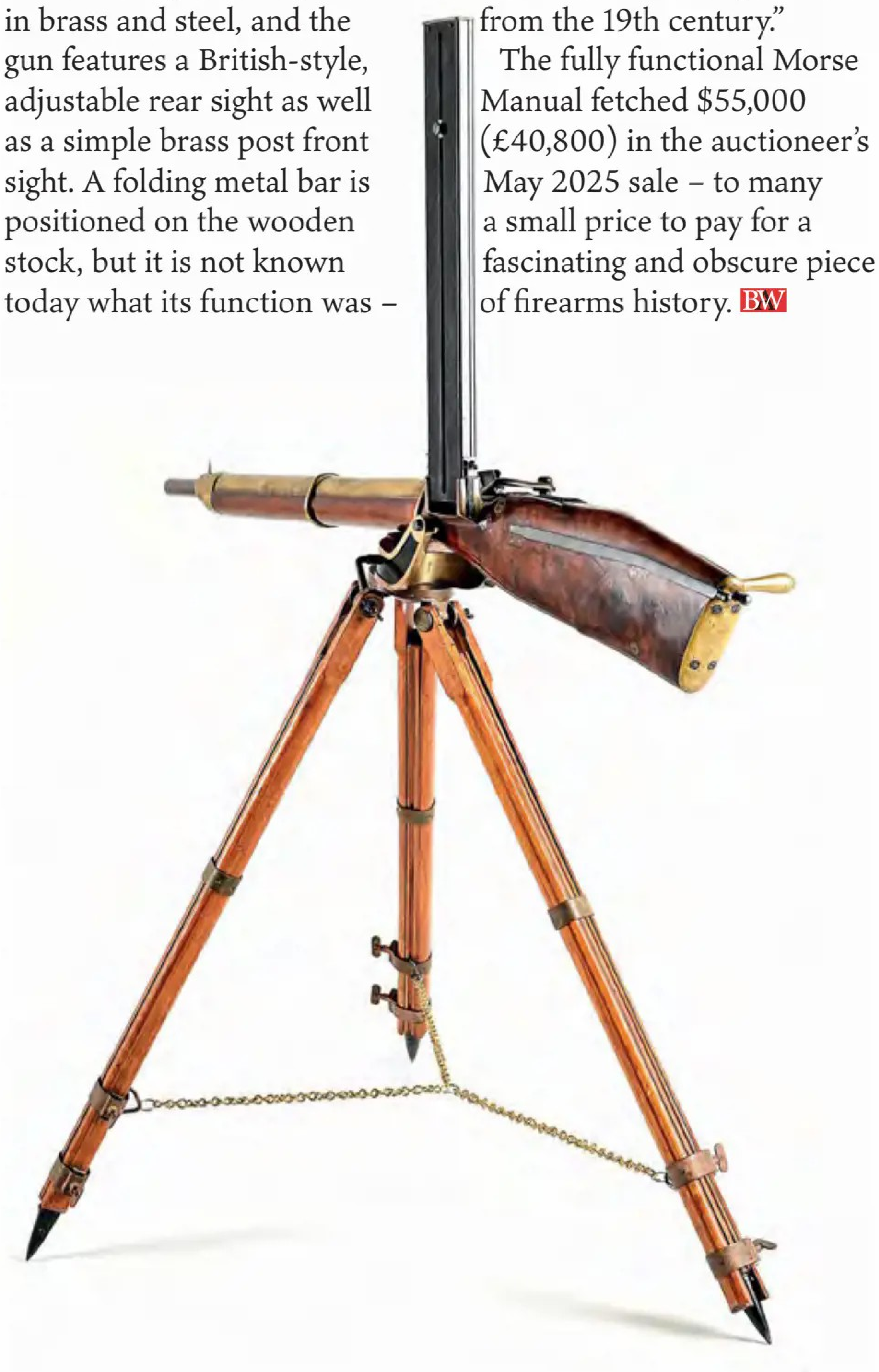
The metal parts are produced in brass and steel, and the gun features a British-style, adjustable rear sight as well as a simple brass post front sight. A folding metal bar is positioned on the wooden stock, but it is not known today what its function was – the same applies for a sliding metal rod that can be pulled from the butt plate.

Described by US-based auction house Morphy Auctions as "extremely fine", the sold gun is original, although the magazines are modern reproductions as are the tripod and mounting piece. A stabilised repair to a 4in crack in the stock is evident.

Morphy said: "Whether you accept the possibility that this rifle has some connection to the Confederate States of America or not, this rifle is still a remarkable piece regarding its design and place in historical development of repeating arms. One cannot overstate the potential significance, nor ignore the effort and quality of design and manufacture of this specimen from the 19th century."

The fully functional Morse Manual fetched $55,000 (£40,800) in the auctioneer's May 2025 sale – to many a small price to pay for a fascinating and obscure piece of firearms history.

Some of the British proof marks on the weapon



The Morse Manual may have seen service in the American Civil War

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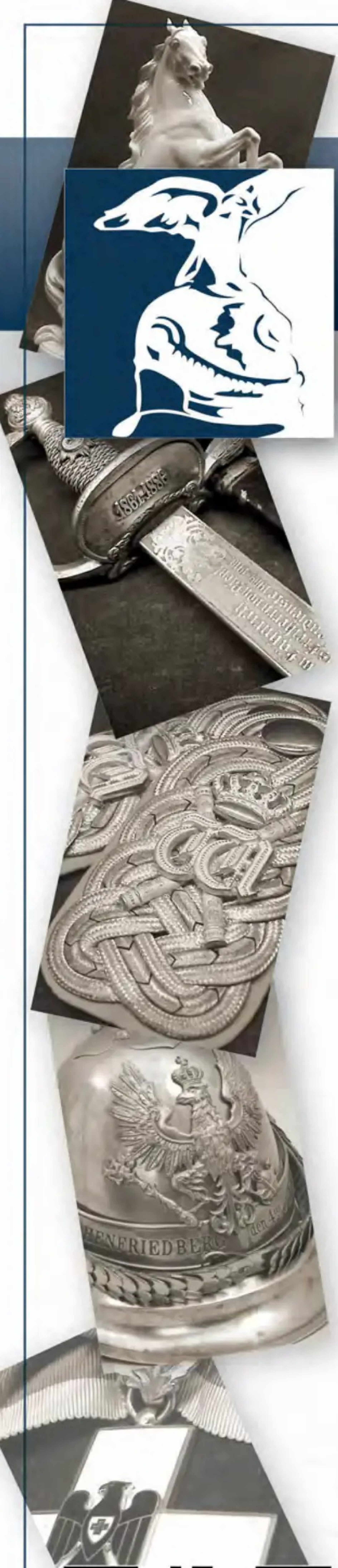

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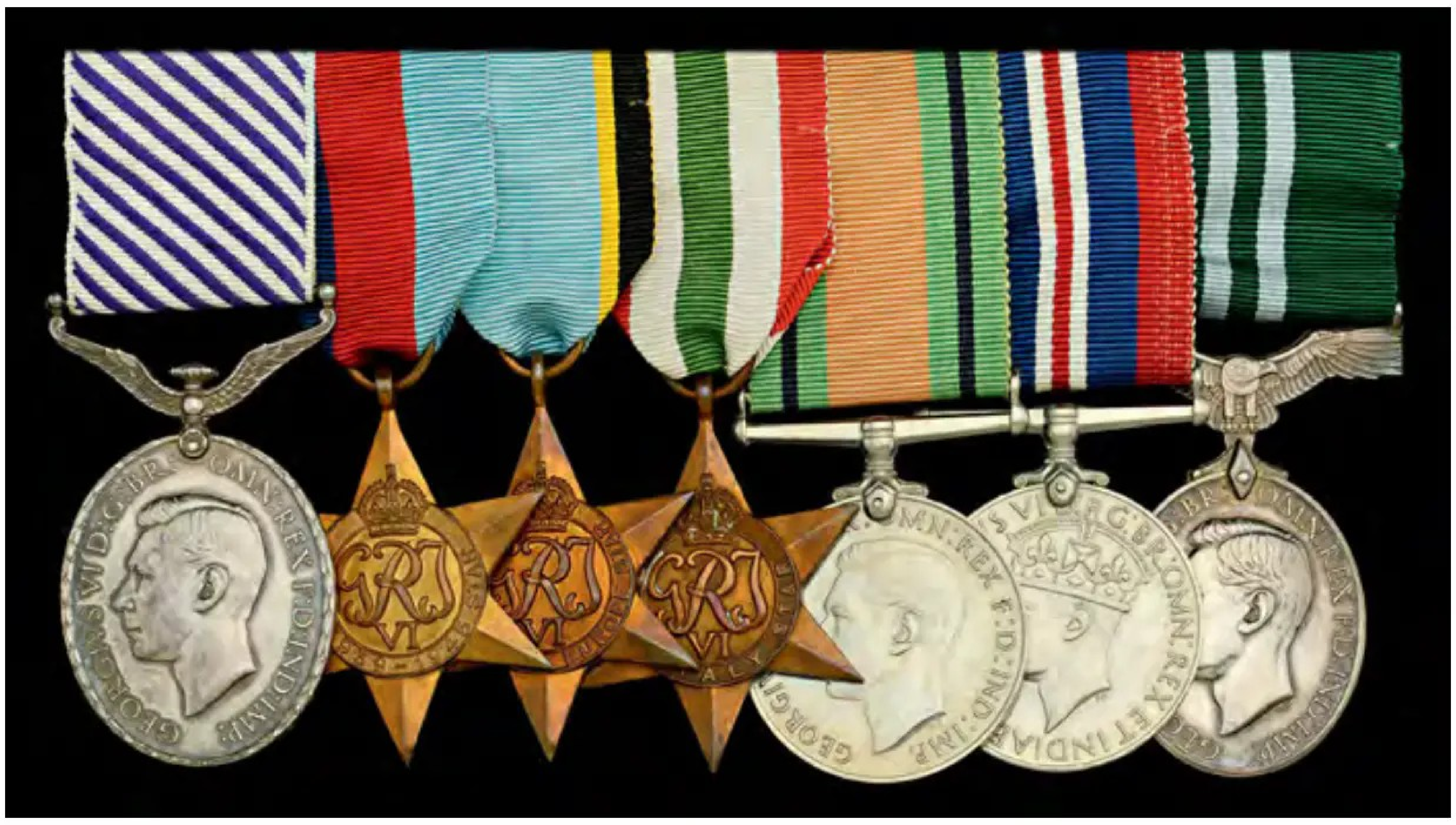
Despatches

An impressive collection of clasps on a sharpshooter's medal and a 'special duties' DFM surpass their estimates

'SPECIAL DUTIES' SQUADRON DFM SOARS TO HIGH PRICE

A DFM group awarded to a Whitley and Halifax wireless operator, who flew 20 sorties with 161 (Special Duties) Squadron, doubled its estimate



IMAGES: NOONANS

Awarded for his "exceptional abilities" as a wireless operator aboard Whitley and Halifax bombers, Sergeant Frank Fewkes' Distinguished Flying Medal citation was announced in the *London Gazette* in January 1942. However, much of the detail concerning clandestine work of Fewkes and 161 (Special Duties) Squadron would not be publicised until long after World War Two.

Frank Fewkes qualified as a Wireless Operator/Air Gunner in August 1939. In April 1940, he was posted to 217 Squadron at RAF St Eval but did not fly operationally. He was then transferred to 10 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at RAF Abingdon before finally taking on operational flying duties with 78 Squadron at RAF Middleton St George in April 1941. Fewkes flew 16 operational sorties in Halifaxes with that squadron between April and July, including operations to Bremerhaven, Wilhelmshaven, Brest, Hamburg and Bremen. On the latter sortie, Fewkes' aircraft was "holed 47 times" by flak, with "all aerials shot away". During a subsequent sortie to Cologne on June 26, Fewkes and his crew braved severe electrical storms and came away unscathed.

In July 1941, Fewkes was posted to 76 Squadron, also based at Middleton St George. Between July and October, he would fly another 13 operational sorties. While flying an operation to Manheim on October 22, Fewkes' Halifax fell out of control. His logbook recorded: "SOS ON Bircham. A/C spun in over Cherbourg to 1,100ft from 8,000ft. Crash landed base." The airman's luck persisted the following month, when, on a sortie to Berlin on September 2, Fewkes and two other airmen were wounded by ground fire. Just three weeks later, the port-outer engine failed shortly after take-off, forcing his crew to ditch their bombs in the North Sea and land. After transferring back to 10 OTU, Fewkes participated in the 1,000 Bomber Raids against Cologne on May 30, 1942, and Essen on June 1, by which time he advanced to pilot officer.

Fewkes' involvement with 161 (Special Duties) Squadron, based at RAF Tempsford, began that September. The squadron's work was highly secret, and the unit did not appear on the RAF list. Its tasks involved the landing and retrieval of SOE agents from occupied Europe, and the delivery of supplies and arms to resistance groups.

He was assigned to 'B' Flight, which used Whitley and Wellington bombers and on several occasions, flew with the highly decorated Flight Lieutenant Philippe Livry-Level, a French airman who acted as navigator. In his book *We Landed by Moonlight*, Fewkes' fellow 161 airman Hugh Verity described Livry-Level's arrival at Tempsford: "He had persuaded the security chiefs that he could be trusted… but he spoke English with such a deplorable accent that anyone within 100 metres could tell at once that he was a foreigner."

Fewkes flew at least 20 operational sorties with 161 Squadron, many in April 1943 that delivered agents and supplies into France and Norway. The following month, he and his crew landed at Algiers to carry out "a specific" – but still undisclosed – operation in which they were apparently unsuccessful. After 52 sorties over France, he transferred to 13 Initial Training Wing at RAF Torquay, after which he retrained as a pilot at 18 Service Flying Training School at RCAF Gimli in Manitoba, before transferring to 1504 BAT Flight School until he was discharged in July 1945.

The Fewkes medal group, comprising his DFM, 1939-45 Star, Air Crew Europe Star, Italy Star, Defence and War Medals 1939-45 and Air Efficiency Award, was sold with photographs of the airman, this RAF Observer's and Air Gunner's Flying Logbook and two tickets to his Buckingham Palace Investiture. The lot, sold by Noonans, doubled its upper estimate of £2,200, fetching £4,400.

HISTORIC COLOURS LEAD BIDDERS

Company Colours carried by Lieutenant-Colonel Horace Stopford at the Battle of Modder River in 1899 have hugely exceeded their estimate at Lawrences Auctioneers

Commissioned into the 46th Regiment of Foot in 1874, Horace Stopford transferred to the Grenadier Guards in 1875 and latterly served as aide-de-camp to the general officer commanding in Ireland, and then as commandant of the School of Instruction for Auxiliary Forces at Wellington Barracks. By 1893, he was a major in the Coldstream Guards and led the regiment's 2nd Battalion in the disastrous first months of the Second Boer War.

On November 28, 1899, during an effort to relieve Kimberley, the Coldstream Guards encountered fierce resistance on the Modder River. This large-scale battle involved some 8,000 British troops, under the command of Lord Methuen, attempt to sieze a bridge across the river. This was defended by at least 2,000 Boers who were dug into the river bank.

Stopford's Battalion endured 12 hours of intense fire and savage heat, losing 92 men, including the colonel. The battalion had deviated from its original orders to assault Razor Back and Sugar Loaf kopjes and despite General Henry Colville's attempts to halt the reckless advance, Stopford

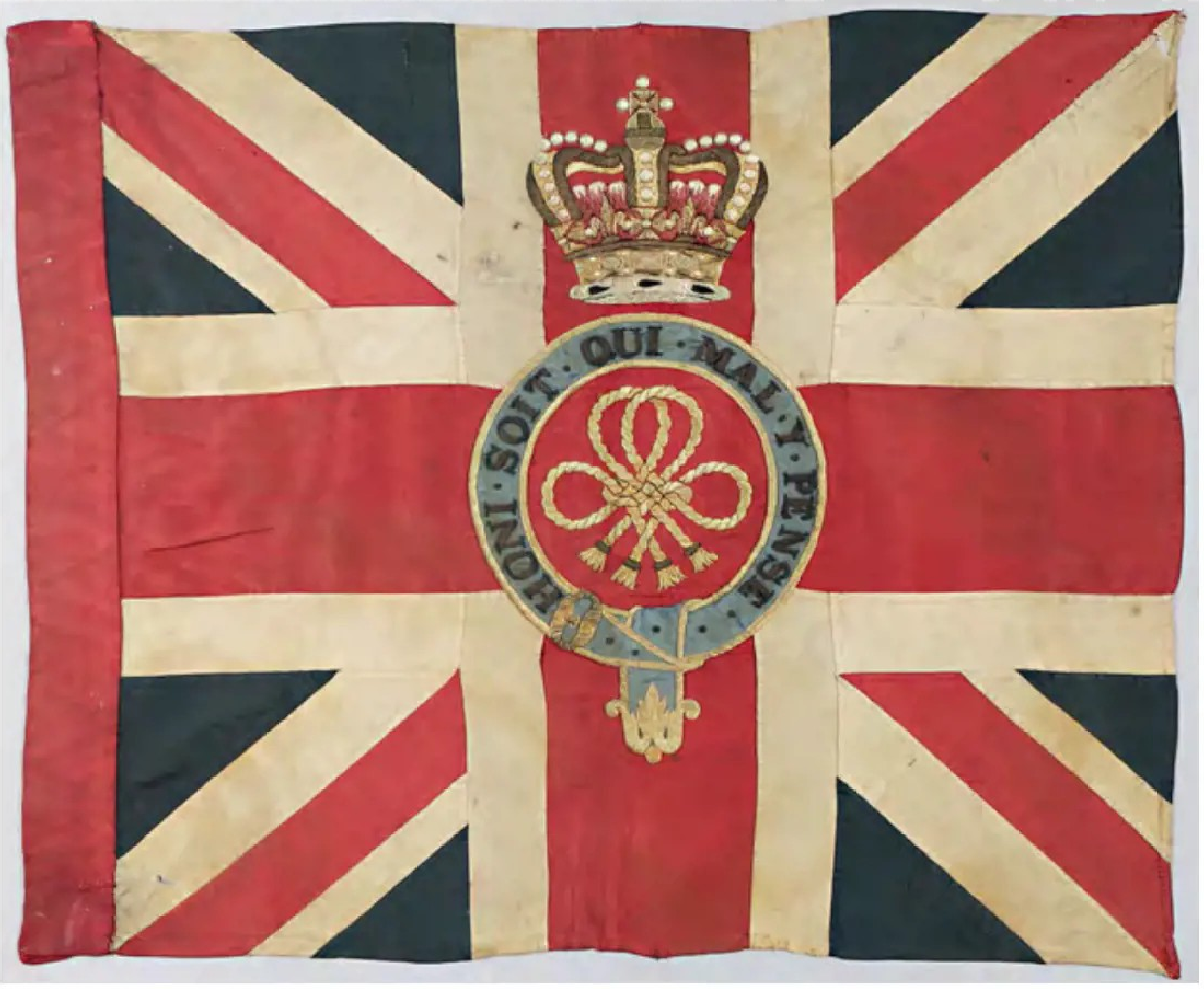


IMAGE: LAWRENCES

pressed his men forward with bayonets fixed. He was struck down and killed while bearing his Company Colours by "one of the first Boer shells fired that day". He was 44.

The units' subsequent actions in seizing the high ground were instrumental in pushing the Boers toward Magersfontein.

Stopford was buried close to where he died and was shortly after reinterred in Kimberley's West End Cemetery. His funeral was conducted by Chaplain W E Sellers at the request of his friend, the Marquis of Winchester, who himself was killed two weeks later at Magersfontein.

Magersfontein, fought on December 11, was the second of a trio of heavy defeats sustained by the British – the others being the Battle of Stormberg and the Battle of Colenso – in what quickly became known as 'Black Week'.

The Colour carried by Stopford when he was killed at the Modder River features a stitched Queen's Crown above a garter enclosing a double knot emblem, all set against the Union Flag. Measuring 18 x 22in, it bears the visible evidence of battle – a repaired tear just left of the Crown caused by a Boer bullet. The Colour was offered alongside contemporary letters, press cuttings, and a copy of *From Belmont to Bloemfontein*, and fetched £2,600 – beating its upper guide of £800.

SHARPSHOOTERS' MEDAL FETCHES £12,000

A Peninsula War Military General Service Medal with 11 clasps, awarded to one of the original sharpshooters of the 95th (Rifle) Regiment of Foot, focused buyers at Noonans

Born in Motson, Hampshire, in 1771, Thomas Harding volunteered for The Prince of Wales's Regiment of Fencible Infantry on February 11, 1795. Stemming from the word *defencible*, fencible regiments were a distinct type of British garrison unit raised amid invasion scares during the Seven Years' War, American and French Revolutionary Wars, and the Napoleonic Wars. Fencibles were confined to home defence and had no liability for overseas service, but differed from the militia in that their rank and file were recruited by ballot, and officers were typically commissioned in the Regular Army.

On July 12, 1800, Harding reenlisted as a private for 'unlimited (long-term) service' with the 'Experimental Corps of Riflemen', at Stockbridge. The Corps was formed only six months prior when Colonel William Stewart requested 33 "quality" NCOs and men from 14 line regiments, and 12 "quality" men each from 33 fencible regiments. They were sent to Horsham, in Sussex, equipped with the new Baker Rifle, and trained in light infantry tactics and marksmanship.

In July 1800, following its involvement in the ill-fated expedition to Ferrol in Spain, the Corps took on a second draft – Harding included – and the unit was made permanent. On January 18, 1803, with the end of the Peace of Amiens and the renewal of war with France, the Corps was brought into the line as the 95th (Rifle) Regiment of Foot, and Harding, together with the rest of the second and first drafts – was formed into the 1st Battalion and equipped with their iconic green uniforms.

Harding served with the 95th Rifles for 25 years, 95 days, first seeing action during the second British assault on the Spanish colony of Buenos Aires in 1807, where he was wounded in the left thigh. Two years later, the sharpshooter was involved in the Walcheren Expedition, and before the end of the year he and his regiment were dispatched to the Peninsula. Harding fought in 11 separate engagements during the campaign there. On June 18, 1815, Harding, by then 44, was at the Battle of Waterloo with the 10th Company, 1st Battalion. He and the remnants of his unit – savaged at Quatre Bras two days prior – were positioned in the centre of Wellington's line, behind La Haye Sainte farmhouse.

On February 24, 1818, Harding was recommended for discharge on the grounds of being "old and worn out". His discharge papers stated he was a "very good soldier, who merited the most favourable consideration of the Board". He was invalided to England and admitted to a Chelsea out-pension of 1/2d per diem and died of apoplexy at Broughton, Hampshire, on March 1, 1859.

Harding's Peninsula War Military General Service 1793-1814 Medal with 11 clasps (Corunna, Busaco, Fuentes D'Onor, Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz, Salamanca, Vittoria, Pyrenees, Nivelle, Nive and Toulouse) was sold alongside a muster report and copied discharge papers. Featuring a silver ribbon buckle and described as "nearly extremely fine", the medal was given an upper estimate of £9,000 but fetched £12,000 at Noonan's May 14 sale.

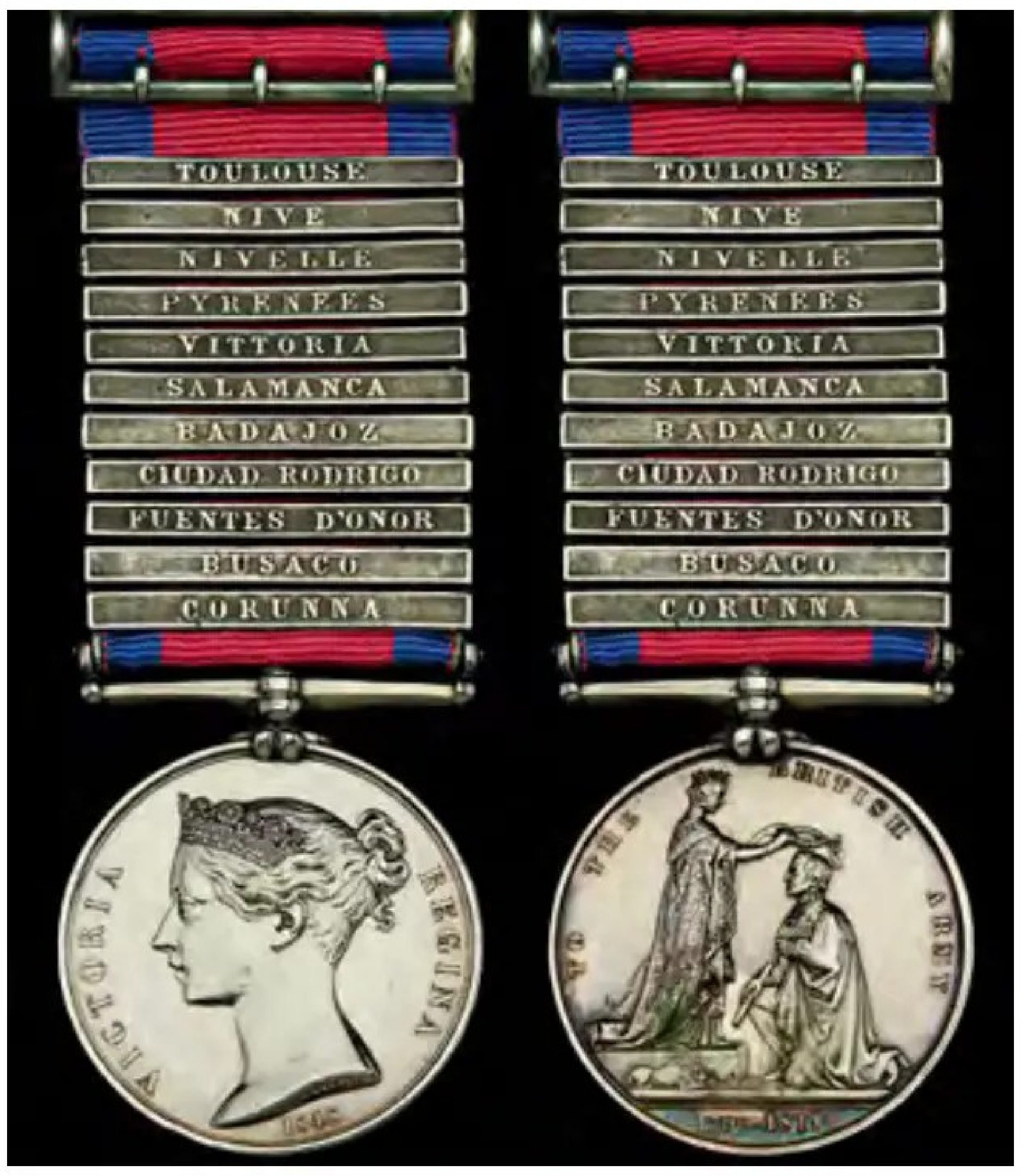


IMAGE: NOONANS

FORTHCOMING SALES

- **Lacy, Scott & Knight** June 13, 2025
- **Vectis Auctions** June 18, 2025
- **Warwick & Warwick** June 18 & August 20, 2025
- **Griffin's Auctioneers & Valuers** June 24, 2025
- **Tennants Auctioneers** June 25, 2025
- **Hartleys Auctioneers and Valuers** July 2, 2025
- **Noonans** July 16, 2025
- **McTear's** July 30, 2025
- **Hansons Auctioneers** July 31, 2025
- **Wilson55** August 6, 2025

NOTE: Listings include medals, militaria, arms and armour, war art and other historical-themed sales. Dates and catalogues are subject to change. Check websites for details and updates.

Debrief

We used Google trends to find six common questions on **disciplinary executions in World War** One and an expert gives informed answers.

This month's historian: Gerry van Tonder

How long did the death sentence exist in the British Army?

The concept of regulatory or statutory codes of conduct in the armed forces dates back to Parliament's desire to control Oliver Cromwell's military strength in the mid-17th Century. However, it was only with the promulgation of the 1879 Army Discipline and Regulation Act that the separate army and parliamentary laws were consolidated.

Two years later, in conjunction with the Childers overhaul of army structure, the Army Act of 1881 became law. The act formalises those offences punishable by death and, of profound significance, "offences punishable more severely on active service than at other times."

Subsequent reviews led to the War Office's *Manual of Military Law (Sixth Edition)* in February 1914, setting the tone for the punishment of offenders. Chapter III (*Offences and Scale of Punishment*) defines a whole range of military indiscipline, including "gross misbehaviour in the field, mutiny and insubordination." Desertion, while comprehensively covered in Sections 13-21, would become the most misunderstood.

Intensive parliamentary lobbying in the 1920s, particularly by Ernest Thurtle MP, went a long way to removing the death sentence for desertion and cowardice. The last British soldier to be executed for an offence other than murder was Private Theodore Schurch, who was hanged for treason in January 1946. He was the only British soldier executed for crimes in World War Two.

The death penalty for military offences in Britain was abolished in 1998, following ratification of the 6th Protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights, and further solidified with the UK's accession to the 13th Protocol in 2003.

How many British soldiers were executed by firing squad in World War One?

Private Harry Farr's case led to the pardoning of British/Commonwealth troops executed in World War One but did not quash their convictions PA/ALAMY

Relative to the number of death sentences imposed, the 346 men who were executed represents a small number, especially in the context of total wartime casualties. At least 91 were already serving suspended sentences, while 41 previously had a death sentence commuted.

Janet Booth, granddaughter of Private Harry Farr (shot for cowardice in 1916), campaigned for a pardon from 1992 until 2006, when Farr's family took the Ministry of Defence to court. They won their case and, under Section 359 (*Pardons for servicemen executed for disciplinary offences: recognition as victims of First World War*) of the newly promulgated Armed Forces Act 2006, soldiers shot during World War One were granted pardons. However, the act makes it clear that the pardon only applied to the execution and "does not lift the convictions or sentences of the servicemen affected."

Which offences resulted in the death penalty?

During World War One, 238,000 British courts martial convictions of all breaches of military disciplinary codes found 20,000 men guilty of capital offences and resulted in

The Shot at Dawn memorial commemorates British/Commonwealth troops executed in World War One, but not those shot for murder or other crimes eligible for capital punishment under contemporary civil law MATT BROWN

the imposition of 3,080 death sentences. Desertion (including absence without leave and draft-dodging) was considered one of the worst offences possible.

Military protocol called for a hierarchical endorsement of certain procedures, including the death sentence imposed by a court martial. In one instance in 1918, when a judgment arrived on his desk, General Henry Horne, GOC First Army, wrote: "The offence of desertion whilst on leave is a common one at the present time, and this case appears to have been committed deliberately, and [as] there are no redeeming circumstances, I feel it is my duty to recommend that the sentence be carried out."

Figures vary considerably, but more than 7,300 trials were for desertion. There were 551 courts martial for cowardice and a smaller number for murder, striking a superior officer, quitting post, failing to follow orders, mutiny, sleeping at post and throwing away weapons. Of this number, 266 were executed for desertion, 37 for murder, 18 for cowardice and the remainder for other offences.

At the time, little was known about the devastating mental impact on soldiers caused by prolonged exposure to combat. Lord Moran, a doctor on the Western Front and future personal physician to Winston Churchill, wrote: "Courage is willpower, whereof no man has an unlimited stock; and when in war it is used up, he is finished."

Was Britain the only one to execute its soldiers?

In comparative statistics for the three main antagonists on the Western Front – Britain, France and Germany – the British imposed the death sentence on more than 3,000 soldiers, while the French condemned 2,000 men and the Germans 150. As many as 700 French soldiers were executed, as were 48 Germans. Scholars believe this disparity is largely due to marked differences in military discipline between the three armed forces.

The judiciousness of the respective military codes often reflected the status ascribed by societies to the army and to soldiering as a profession. In Britain, in particular, discipline and obedience were often deemed to be achievable only through traditional concepts and application of punishment based on fear and deterrence. Fighting for the King's shilling tended to be held in low regard by all strata of society, a refuge for alcoholic and criminal miscreants.

More concerned with national security, the French code of 1857 enshrined the removal of the transgressor to a compagnie de discipline, thereby isolating likely revolutionaries.

In Germany, the draconian Prussian code was solidly based on honour, and the threat of potential "loss of nobility" and all its consequences was a powerful deterrent, particularly within the officer aristocracy. The post-war demise of German nobility would see executions for desertion increase to 18,000 in Nazi Germany.

The United States executed 35 soldiers, Canada 25, Belgium 12, New Zealand five, South Africa one and Australia and Japan zero. Figures for the Ottomans and Russians are unknown, and Italy shot 750. Typically, a small percentage of those issued the death penalty were executed, but Austria-Hungary executed 98% of the 1,175 men so sentenced.

How was a firing squad organised in the British Army?

In the absence of specific protocol in the Army Act, the *Manual of Military Law* or the *Regulations for the use of the Provost Marshal's Branch, British Armies in France 1917*, execution procedures appear to have been largely at the discretion of local commanders and provosts martial. This included the site, the day and hour and arrangements for a chaplain, medical officer, burial party and the fixed object to which the condemned would be secured.

Many considered the selection and conduct of the firing squad to be the biggest flaw in the procedure. Records reveal that the firing detail came from either the prisoner's unit, from among the walking wounded or, in many cases, soldiers who were forced or duped into being in the squad. Firing squads varied from two to 25 men, and usually the rifles were chambered with live rounds and one or two with blanks, from which a blind selection would be made. This gave the illusion that a soldier might not fire the fatal shot – at least until the trigger was pulled, as the difference in recoil would be noticeable. An NCO would be in charge of the squad, while a junior officer gave the order to "Fire!"

Soldiers often deliberately shot wide or merely wounded the man. There are accounts of the prisoner screaming and writhing until the officer administered a coup de grace with his revolver – another horrifying requisite duty of the procedure.

What were the other forms of punishment?

Capital punishment was not the army's only means of punishment: 90% of British death sentences were commuted and lesser offences demanded lighter penalties. Hard labour or penal servitude were common, and despite having been partially abolished in 1867 the Anglo-Zulu War saw a resurgence in flogging prior to its total abolition in 1881.

From then, Field Punishment Number One (FP No.1) and Number Two (FP No.2) were introduced as more humane punishments. A commanding officer could award 28 days field punishment while a court martial could award 90 days.

FP No.1 comprised a convict being bound or cuffed hand and foot and attached to a fixed object such as the wheel of a field gun for up to two hours a day. For FP No.2, the offender, though still restrained, would not be secured and could still perform drill. In both forms, the soldier also faced hard labour and loss of pay. During World War One, there were 60,000 cases where FP No.1 was enforced. BW

Field Post

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An Englishman, Irishman and Welshman, walk into a recruiting office...

...but where is the Scotsman? A recent article in *The Times* shook me by revealing that military recruiting north of the border is down 41% in ten years. In all of 2024 only 370 Scots joined up.

The fine reputation of the Scottish Regiments was forged on battlefields from Waterloo to Mons, as well as the exploits of the 51st Highland Division and other Scottish units in World War Two. However, young Scots are not joining up anymore. As I was an army recruiter in Scotland for several years, I experienced the issues first-hand.

Perhaps the problems began in 2004, with the decision to amalgamate famous Scottish Regiments into the amorphous Royal Regiment of Scotland. This saw the demise of such famous names as the Black Watch, Kings Own Scottish Borderers and Royal Scots – the latter raised in 1633 and nicknamed 'Pontius Pilot's bodyguard'. The move severed generational and community ties going back centuries. I saw this happen, as I photographed the formation parade of 1 Scots (KOSB & Royal Scots) in 2006 (shown), where the combined battalion formed up with 700 men. Yet, less than 18 months later, it was bringing in Commonwealth soldiers from Fiji to fill its ranks.

Veterans and families formed a campaign group, but it came to nought. The original seven battalions of the Royal Regiment of Scotland have since reduced to three, with an additional Ceremonial Company (4 Scots).

The loss of famous regiments and their esprit de corps, combined with closing the Scottish Depot at Glencorse and the decision to outsource recruiting to a civilian company, have created the perfect storm. Any youth seeking to enlist faces months caught in the system and then – if they get through the torturous online process – having to train in England. All this occurred when the question of Scottish independence was at the fore, and while casualties were being sustained in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Army, meanwhile, focused its recruiting efforts on minorities, and while inclusion is important the truth remains that, according to 2024 government statistics, 89% of army personnel are male, and 89% are white. Recruiters need to be able to also appeal to that demographic group.

You can hardly blame young Scots. Things can be turned around, but it will take a fundamental rethink of policy. Recruiting needs to be taken back in house so the first point of contact is with someone wearing uniform, and the process simplified. Finally, the army must reconnect with its core recruiting base rather than only seeking to mirror our diverse society.

Recruitment must be prioritised if we want to project a strong defence. Food for thought given the current strategic reality.

Craig Allen
Former paratrooper, firearms instructor and recruiter

QUEEN'S
GALLERY

Jutland jumble

Our thanks to **Steve Clarke**, whose eagle eyes spotted two small errors in our recent interview with Admiral Jellicoe's grandson (*Jutland vs the U-boats: Jellicoe's greatest victory?*, *BAW*, May 2025). As always, we are more than happy to correct a mistake.

Steve told us: "I've just finished reading the article on Admiral John Jellicoe, which was extremely interesting as I've been interested in World War One naval history since my childhood. However, two of the photographs are miscaptioned. On page 24, the photograph of the sinking battleship HMS *Victoria*, HMS *Camperdown* is mistakenly named HMS *Cambeltown* – different ship, different conflict!

"Then, on page 27, the photograph of the demise of HMS *Queen Mary* states that the ship to the left is HMS *Lion*. It's actually HMS *Princess Royal*. *Lion* will be ahead of *Princess Royal*, further to the left of the photograph as the disposition of the 1st Battlecruiser Squadron at Jutland was *Lion*, *Princess Royal*, *Queen Mary* and then *Tiger*. This photograph often appears miscaptioned in other publications, usually in a cropped format."

A big thank you

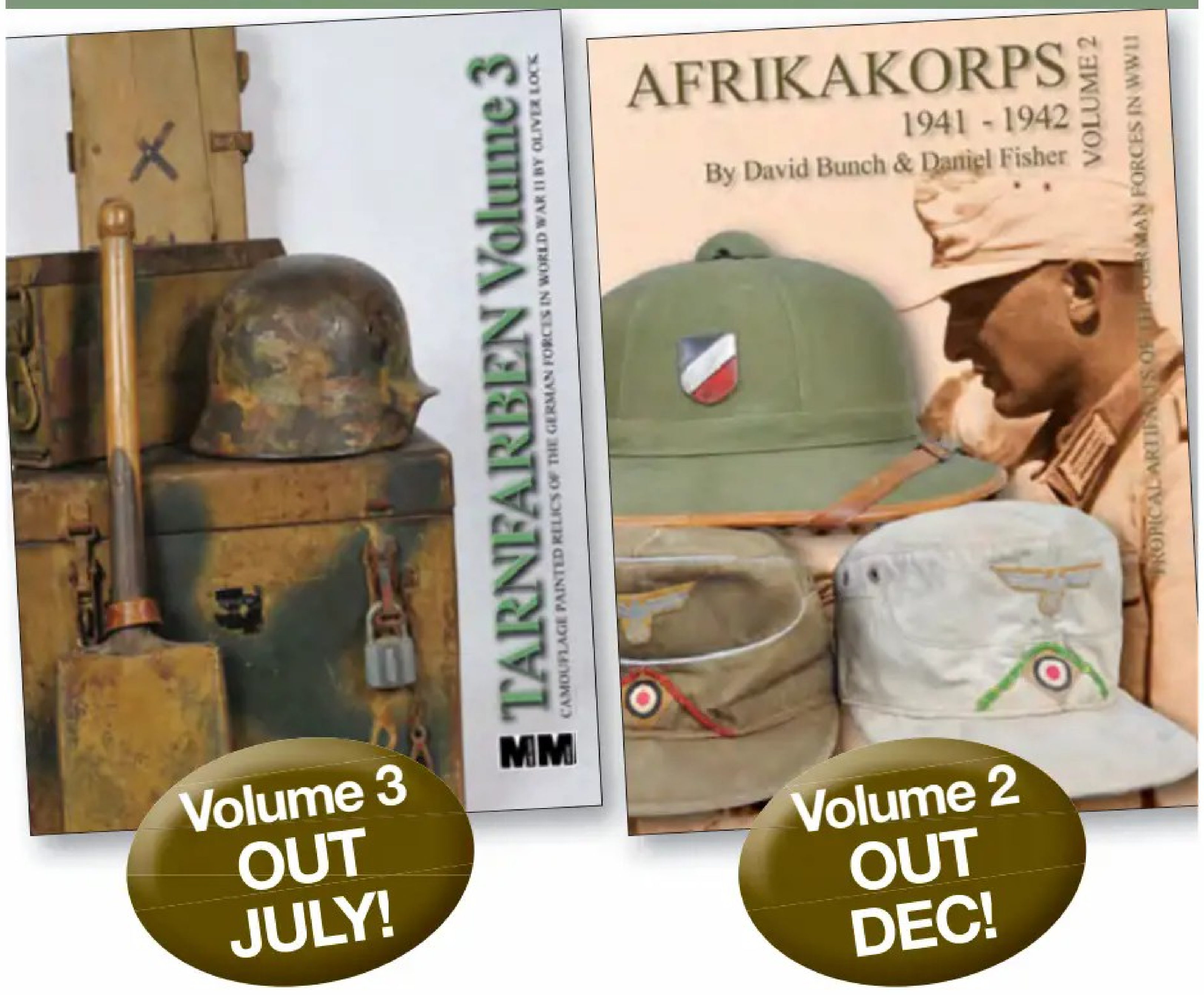
In the March 2025 edition of *BAW*, you were able to publish an article by Toby Clark regarding our father, Richard Preston (*Home Guard to Hobo's Guard*), which summarised his World War Two service and highlighted some of his experiences during a varied service career that saw him move from a young man in the Home Guard into the 79th Armoured Division where he later provided close protection to the division's maverick commander, General Percy Hobart.

As you referred to in the article, Dad was looking forward to seeing his story in print. Sadly, despite yours and Toby's haste, this just was not to be. However, what I can tell you that Dad would have been very proud of the article and the efforts taken to present it.

I was able to obtain several copies, and these were sent to family and close friends all over the world. *BAW* was sent to Ireland, Australia and also the USA, and, pleasingly, everyone who read the magazine was touched by the article and found it a fitting tribute to Richard. They asked me to convey their thanks to Toby and the *BAW* team.

Liam Preston

NEW BOOKS!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IN A CLASS OF HIS OWN

While serving among the best of the best, the reputation of Squadron Leader Alec Cranswick has not enjoyed the profile of other RAF legends – something that intensely annoyed Pathfinder chief Air Vice-Marshal Donald Bennett
Sean Feast shines a light on a down-to-earth hero deserving of the highest praise

Within the ranks of RAF Bomber Command, were some truly remarkable men – Guy Gibson, Leonard Cheshire and Mickey Martin perhaps being among the best known. Indeed, it is their names that feature in the *Official History of the Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany* as 'the greatest bomber pilots of the war'.

It is, however, a bold claim, for there were many others who were equally deserving of a place in the pantheon of greatness. Men like Brian 'Tubby' Baker, Robert Palmer, and James 'Willie' Tait, for example, who each flew more than 100 operations, Palmer receiving the Victoria Cross. How about Guy Lockhart, whose operational record flying Spitfires, Lysanders, Lancasters and Mosquitos is perhaps unrivalled in the annals of war.

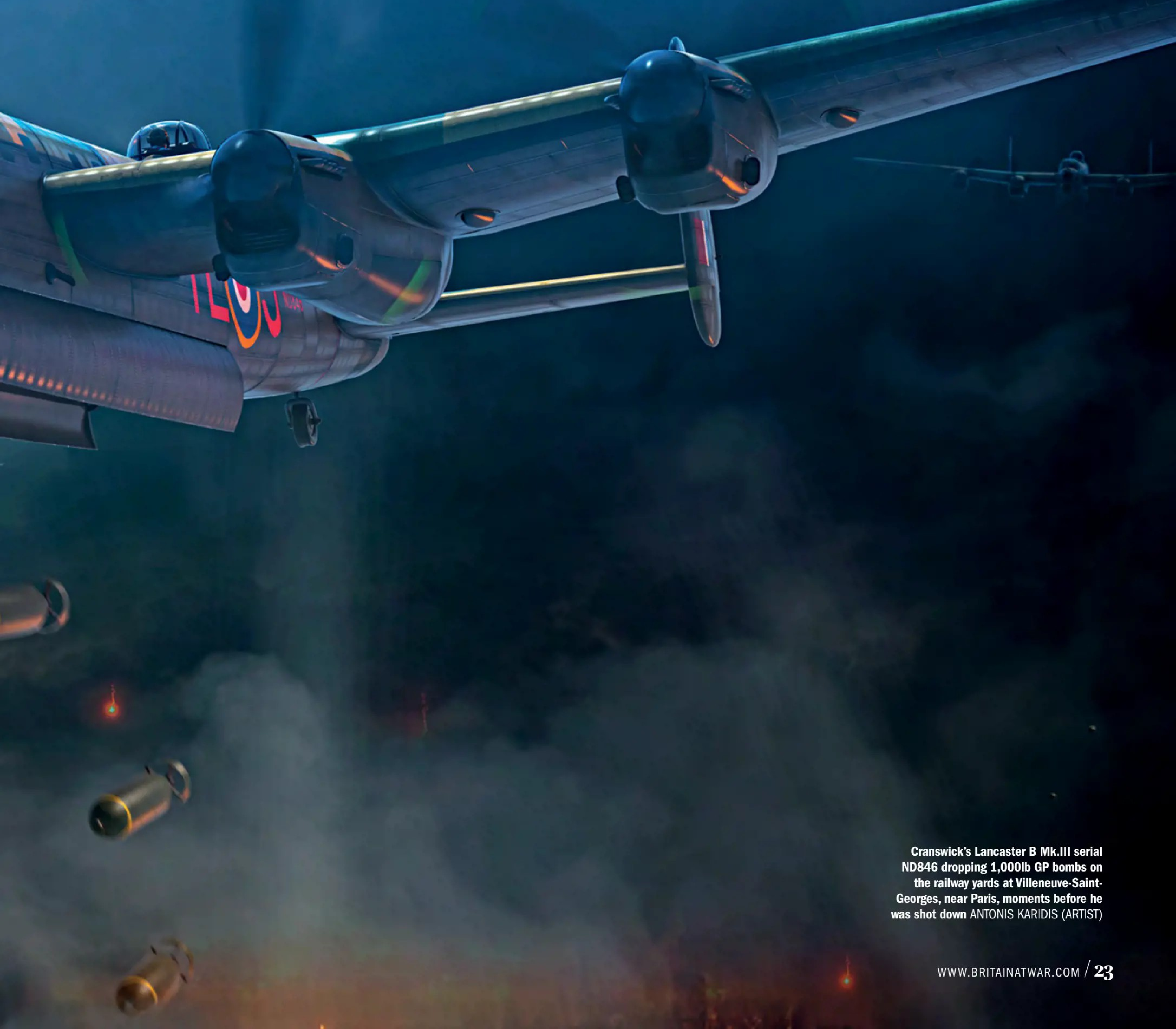
There were others too whose names have been all but forgotten in the passage of time. 'Benny' Benson and navigator Ron Curtis, for example, two of the great Mosquito airmen, who flew 145 and 139 bombing trips respectively, and Johnny Fauquier, described as 'Canada's greatest bomber pilot' who completed three tours.

There is another name deserving of the highest praise and to whom Donald Bennett, who commanded the elite Pathfinder Force during the war, dedicated his autobiography. His name is Alec Cranswick, who at the time of his death had flown possibly more operations than any other Bomber Command pilot.

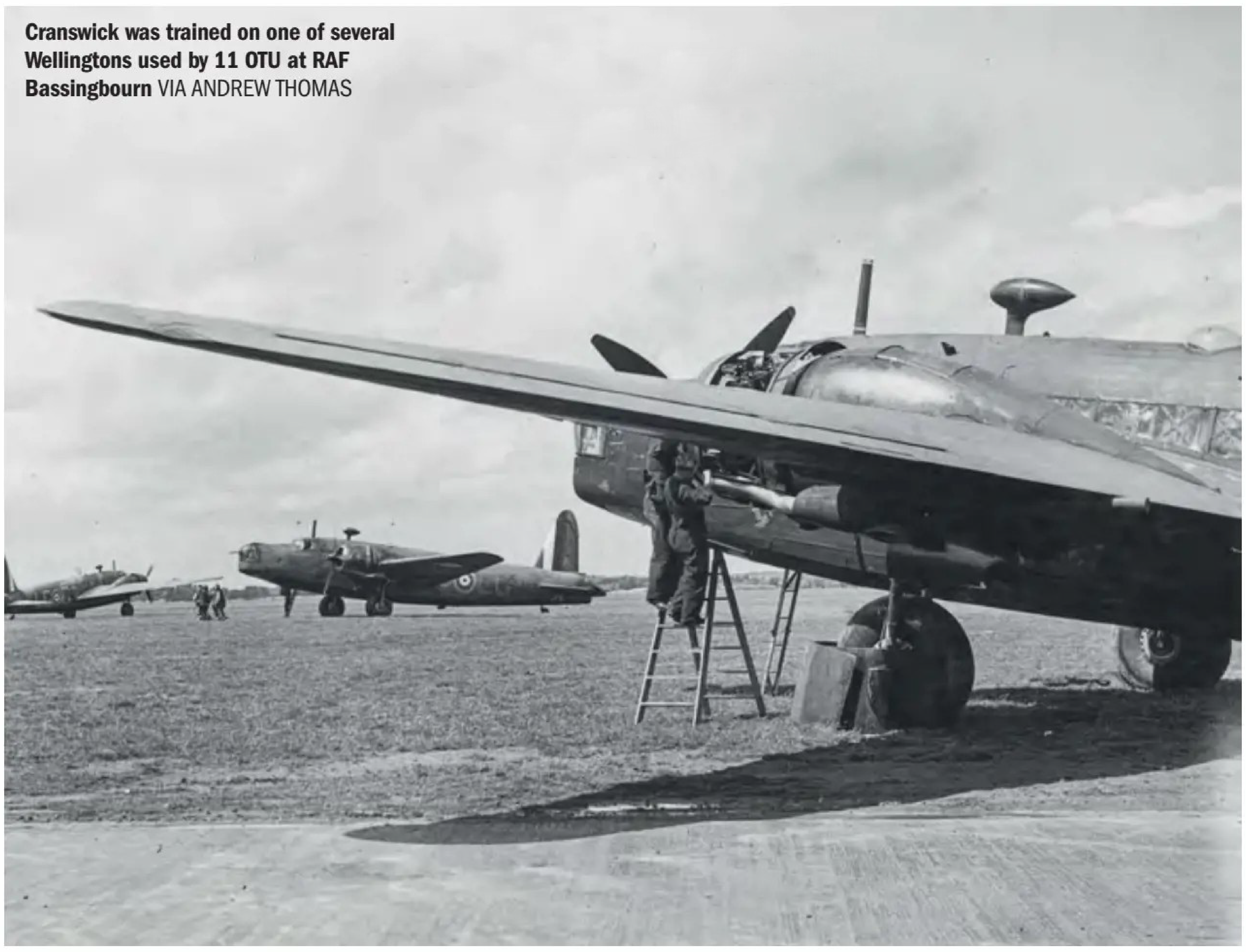
In his father's footsteps

Alec Panton Cranswick was born in Oxford on September 7, 1919. His father

Alec Cranswick, a forgotten RAF legend who achieved much but has not received recognition equal to that of other great airmen IMAGES VIA AUTHOR UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE



Cranswick's Lancaster B Mk.III serial ND846 dropping 1,000lb GP bombs on the railway yards at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, near Paris, moments before he was shot down ANTONIS KARIDIS (ARTIST)



Cranswick was trained on one of several Wellingtons used by 11 OTU at RAF Bassingbourn VIA ANDREW THOMAS

had been a Royal Engineer decorated for gallantry in World War One before transferring to the RAF and qualifying as a pilot. Tragedy came early into young Alec's life when his father was killed in a mid-air collision over Salisbury Plain on June 5, 1928, leaving his mother to bring him and his sister up alone.

Somehow, she afforded for him to attend St Edward's in Oxford, the famous 'Teddies' whose RAF alumni included Gibson, Douglas Bader, and the great air reconnaissance 'ace', Adrian Warburton. A keen rider and rower, with an equally keen sense of adventure, Alec travelled lightly through school and was something of a mystery to those who taught him. One teacher said that he was not especially academic and prone to daydreaming: "He goes into a kind of trance, and we only know he is still with us then because he appears to be breathing and, strangely enough, thinking deeply."

On leaving school, Alec had an ambition to join the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The scheme, however, came to nought. He joined, instead, the Metropolitan Police based out of Limehouse Police Station. After two years in the force – and with the career not quite matching his ideal – he decided to follow his father's footsteps into the RAF, commencing his flying training in summer 1939 at 7 Elementary and Reserve Flying Training School at Desford, Leicestershire. Instructed on the ubiquitous de Havilland DH.82 Tiger Moth, Alec went solo after 13 hours, well within the accepted tolerance.

214 Squadron's crews took its aircraft to targets in Germany through 1940 before, that summer, attacking German invasion shipping

He completed his first stage of training shortly after the outbreak of war, being rated 'average' and commissioned as a pilot officer on a four-year short service commission. From Desford he progressed to 10 Flying Training School at West Drayton, swapping a single engine biplane for a twin-engine Avro Anson, determined to become a bomber boy. By April 7, 1940, he was at 11 Operational Training Unit at Bassingbourn where he was introduced to the Vickers Wellington. From Bassingbourn, and with his logbook dutifully signed by the chief flying instructor, he was posted to 214 Squadron at Stradishall, arriving on June 5.

Wellington crews comprised two pilots, the 'captain' being the more experienced. Here Alec struck gold. His flight commander, Squadron Leader Wilfred 'Tommy' Thomson, was so impressed with Alec's keenness, that he appointed him to sit in the second pilot's seat.

Calm under pressure

Their first trip together, a sortie to Leverkusen – home to IG Farben chemical factories – went without a hitch. Their fifth was rather more eventful when severe icing over the target obliged Thomson to dive to escape going into a spin, by which time the crew had donned parachutes. Only after a titanic struggle did Thomson regain control of the aircraft. "Throughout," he would say later, "Cranswick appeared to remain very calm, almost unconcerned."

At the end of July, Thomson was promoted and posted away to command

Cranswick joined 148 Squadron in Malta, later moving to Egypt, where he participated on raids on Benghazi. These 148 Squadron Wellington Mk.IIs overfly the Nile Delta, late 1941 R THIRSK

Cranswick's beloved pet German Shepherd dog sometimes accompanied the pilot on missions

> ***"After two years in the Metropolitan Police – and with a career not quite matching his ideal – Alec decided to follow his father's footsteps into the RAF"***

Cranswick posing for the camera, the ribbon for his DFC visible beneath his RAF wings

38 Squadron, with whom he was later awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross. Alec was made captain of his own aircraft and crew which included, briefly, a somewhat older air gunner – Flight Lieutenant Bill Fielding-Johnson – who wore the ribbon of the Military Cross and Bar he'd won in World War One.

Throughout the late summer and early autumn of 1940, while the Battle of Britain raged above London during the day and the threat of invasion loomed large, Cranswick and his fellow bomber crews set out by night to bomb various targets in enemy occupied Europe. If the primary target could not be found or attacked, secondary targets – typically airfields – were preferred. This happened to Alec on August 24. He arrived at the power station at Knapsack near Cologne to find the facility obscured by thick cloud. Despite making several passes, the cloud stubbornly refused to clear. He successfully bombed the airfield at Schiphol instead, seeming to catch the Germans unawares.

On another occasion, briefed to bomb the barges being assembled at Boulogne and other Channel ports to carry an invasion force, Alec dived below the cloud cover to find the target and ran into a seemingly impenetrable wall of flak. Unperturbed, he cocked a deaf ear to his co-pilot's urging to abandon the mission and completed his attack.

Alec's first trip to 'The Big City' – as Berlin was known – on the night of October 7/8 nearly ended in disaster. Hit by flak in the fuel tank, the crew faced a long trip home, made more difficult by poor weather. The squadron's Operations Record Book states: 'Crashed at Horsham St Faith. The crew were uninjured.' Alec made a successful forced landing on a dummy airfield, and happily all emerged shaken but otherwise unscathed.

In foreign climes

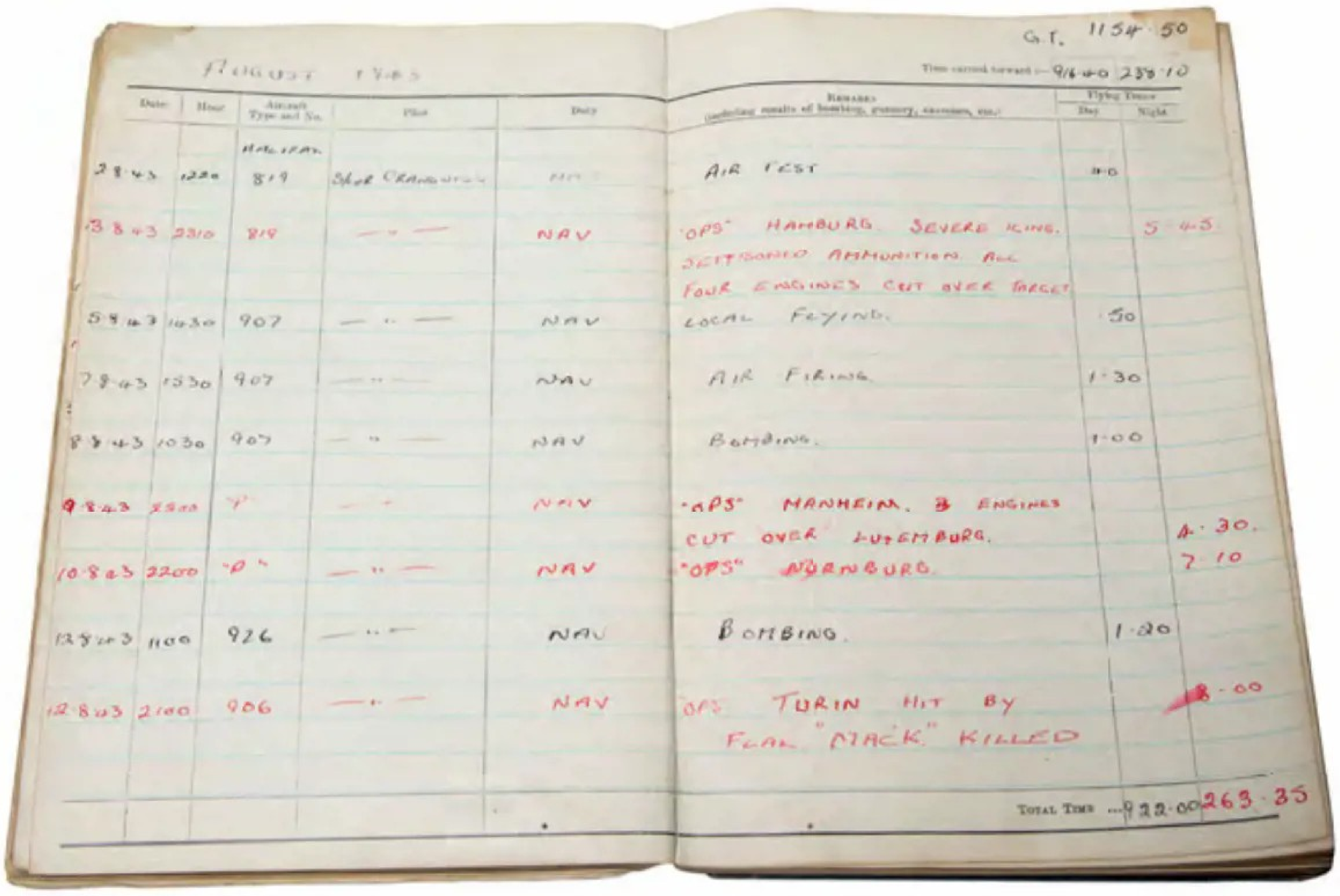
The crew completed further sorties to Berlin, Kiel and Bremerhaven as autumn turned to winter and before the year was out, Alec had completed 29 trips. Facing a period of 'rest' – which usually meant a spell instructing – he chose to volunteer for service overseas.

The staging post for all aircraft destined for the Middle East theatre was Malta, and on the night of December 8 he set out for the tiny island state, only to lose the pilot's hatch on take-off. With a full weight of fuel onboard he decided to press on, despite the cold and discomfort, and successfully made landfall at Luqa the following morning.

Although expecting to be quickly despatched onwards, Alec and his crew were retained on the island, becoming part of 148 Squadron. This unit was conducting operations against Italian targets in Italy and North Africa, as well as occasional sweeps against enemy shipping in the Mediterranean. Opposition was initially slight, but as German reinforcements were moved to the front, flak and fighter defences became noticeably heavier and more deadly.

By the end of March 1941, Alec had completed a total of 46 operations, partly from Malta and the balance from Kabrit, Egypt, from where the squadron was now operating. At this time, most of his crew returned home, but Alec opted to stay on, transferring to Takoradi in West Africa on a detachment to ferry aircraft to North Africa. Local conditions and the stress of operations took their toll, however, and Alec spent several weeks in hospital with bouts of malaria and scarlet fever, illnesses from which he never truly recovered.

In October 1941 he returned to his old unit, which was still operating from Kabrit.



G.T. 1154·50

Time carried forward :— 916·40 258·10

AUGUST 1943

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	Remarks (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	Flying Times Day	Flying Times Night
2.8.43	1220	HALIFAX 819	S/Ldr CRANSWICK	NAV	AIR TEST	1·0	
3.8.43	2310	819	—"—	NAV	"OPS" HAMBURG. SEVERE ICING. JETTISONED AMMUNITION. ALL FOUR ENGINES CUT OVER TARGET		5·45
5.8.43	1430	907	—"—	NAV	LOCAL FLYING.	·50	
7.8.43	1530	907	—"—	NAV	AIR FIRING	1·30	
8.8.43	1030	907	—"—	NAV	BOMBING.	1·00	
9.8.43	2300	"	—"—	NAV	"OPS" MANHEIM. 3 ENGINES CUT OVER LUXEMBURG.		4·30
10.8.43	2200	"O"	—"—	NAV	"OPS" NÜRNBURG.		7·10
12.8.43	1100	926	—"—	NAV	BOMBING.	1·20	
12.8.43	2100	906	—"—	NAV	OPS TURIN HIT BY FLAK "MACK" KILLED		8·00

TOTAL TIME ... 922·00 263·35

Air bomber William McRobbie succinctly noted the perils of the crew's ice flight in his logbook

Tactics and targets had changed; and now the Wellingtons would fly from their main base to a series of landing grounds nearer to the coast, refuel, and proceed onwards to Benghazi with a frequency such that the route was nicknamed the Benghazi Mail Run. In early November he dropped one of the squadron's first 4,000lb 'Cookie' bombs on the harbour, but was obliged to force land in the desert on the return trip. Thankfully, he was quickly found by friendly troops and returned to his unit.

As the winter of 1941 gave way to the spring of 1942, Alec was stood down and awarded the DFC. The citation stated that he had "proved himself a most capable captain, whose determination to complete his task, often under difficult conditions, has been exceptional". He was credited with having completed 61 operational sorties.

Cold reception

Poor health meant a new job was found for Alec on his return to Britain, and he was soon working with the Ministry of Aircraft Production. However, by the end of the year, he was considered fit enough for further operational flying. He was posted to 1659 Conversion Unit at Leeming to learn to fly the Halifax and allocated a crew of very experienced airmen. Initially posted to 419 Squadron, a Canadian unit at Middleton St George, he flew an eventful trip to Lorient on January 29 where the undercarriage collapsed on landing. He soon after volunteered himself and his crew for duties with Donald Bennett's Pathfinder Force (PFF) and was readily accepted into their ranks. By now he had also acquired an Alsatian puppy, Kluva – who not only flew with the crew but also had his own official logbook!

After a sojourn at the Ministry of Aircraft Production, Cranswick converted to fly the Halifax and joined the Pathfinder Force's 35 Squadron OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

"Alec dropped one of 148 Squadron's first 4,000lb 'Cookie' bombs on the harbour, but was obliged to force land in the desert on the return trip"

Alec completed his Pathfinder training with 35 Squadron at Graveley and flew his first PFF sortie within ten days of arrival. On the night of April 16, 1943, Alec was on the outward leg to the Pilsen Skoda Works in Czechoslovakia when a Luftwaffe Bf 110 appeared dead ahead – and flashed past his nose at full speed, no doubt frightening both pilots half to death. Having made good his escape, Alec's Halifax was then coned by searchlights over the target, and the aircraft was peppered by flak. As his rear gunner Ivor Howard noted in his logbook on their return: "Shaky do." The air bomber, Warrant Office William McRobbie similarly noted: "Coned for five minutes. Nearly collided with a 110".

Four days later, for Alec's 75th operational sortie, they were detailed for another long-haul mission to Stettin, on the Baltic coast. Timing was everything in the Pathfinder Force and it was just as much of a sin to arrive too early as it was to appear too late. Stooging around the city to kill time, Alec was subjected to the fierce attention of the German gunners, the aircraft being hit several times from the ground, before he could at last drop his markers and turn for home. As he did so, however, his Halifax was caught by a series of bursts that punctured great holes into his aircraft and forced him to dive. Only with the help of his flight engineer was Alec able to recover the aircraft before it was too late and head gratefully out to sea and comparative safety.

Alec's tally of sorties continued to mount and in July 1943 he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, the citation stating that "his excellent and sustained

In April 1944, Cranswick married Val Parr, but sadly, he would not see the birth of his son

efforts” had been “worthy of the highest praise”. A few weeks after the award, on August 3, Alec was part of a raid involving 750 bombers for an attack on Hamburg. As they climbed through thick cloud on their way out, ice began appearing on the leading edges of the wings.

Ice was dangerous for many reasons, adding weight to the aircraft and impacting its aerodynamic performance. It also troubled the engines which registered their complaints by starting to spit and splutter. Great clumps of ice began breaking off and bashing the fuselage, just as the sparkling lights of St Elmo’s fire began dancing around the propeller blades. Struggling to simply maintain height – let alone climb – Alec ordered the crew to jettison all ammunition, and anything not bolted down, to save weight. He held onto the bombs, however, determined that having come this far, their efforts should not be wasted. Five miles short of the target, all four engines suddenly gave up the ghost, and the aircraft went into a glide. Somehow Alec still maintained control for long enough for McRobbie to toggle the bombs away.

By now, the Halifax was so low that ice was no longer a problem, and the engines spluttered back into life almost as quickly as they had stopped. As the bombs fell, the aircraft leapt into the sky and the crew breathed a collective sigh of relief.

McRobbie summed up the trip succinctly: “Ops Hamburg. Severe icing. Jettisoned ammunition. All four engines cut over target.”

Shells from below

On August 17, 1943, Alec took part in the now famous attack on Germany’s rocket research establishment at Peenemünde, recording his 87th trip. A week later he flew the first of three major attacks on Berlin in the opening phase of what was to be a long and drawn-out campaign against the German capital.

Alec concluded his third tour of operations comprising 96 sorties overall on October 4, with a successful attack on Frankfurt, after which he was posted to fly a desk as an operations staff officer at HQ PFF in Huntingdon. His disappointment at being rested was compensated by meeting the girl of his dreams, Leading Aircraftwoman Val Parr, and the couple were married on April 14, 1944.

By then, his agitations to return for a fourth tour of operations had borne fruit, and he also had the pleasure of persuading his old rear gunner, Ivor Howard, to join him. Returning to 35 Squadron, which was now equipped with Lancasters (Bennett had decided to rationalise his force to Lancasters and Mosquitos), Alec flew the first trip of his fourth tour on May 19, a relatively easy trip to Boulogne.

The Allies were now preparing the way for the invasion of Europe, for which Bomber Command and the PFF had a vital role to play. Three more sorties over the next four nights brought his tally to the magic 100, and the enemy were not in the mood for celebrating, attacking his aircraft en route to the target.

The commander of the PPF was the Australian officer Air Vice-Marshal Don Bennett, the RAF’s youngest air-vice marshal – and a technically gifted individual as well as an expert aviator
OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

Cranswick’s regular 35 Squadron crew, just two would survive the war, with Ivor Howard prevented from flying on July 4/5, and Wilfred Horner being thrown clear from the stricken bomber and descending by parachute

The success of D-Day and the breakout from Normandy depended on preventing the Germans from bringing reinforcements to the front, and to that end railway marshalling yards and other such transport infrastructure became essential targets. On the night of July 4/5, and with his pregnant wife in hospital, Alec set out in Lancaster ND846 as one of 16 aircraft from 35 Squadron to lead an attack on Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. Ivor Howard was forbidden to fly on medical grounds, and so his place in the rear turret was taken by a 'spare bod'. Perhaps it was an omen.

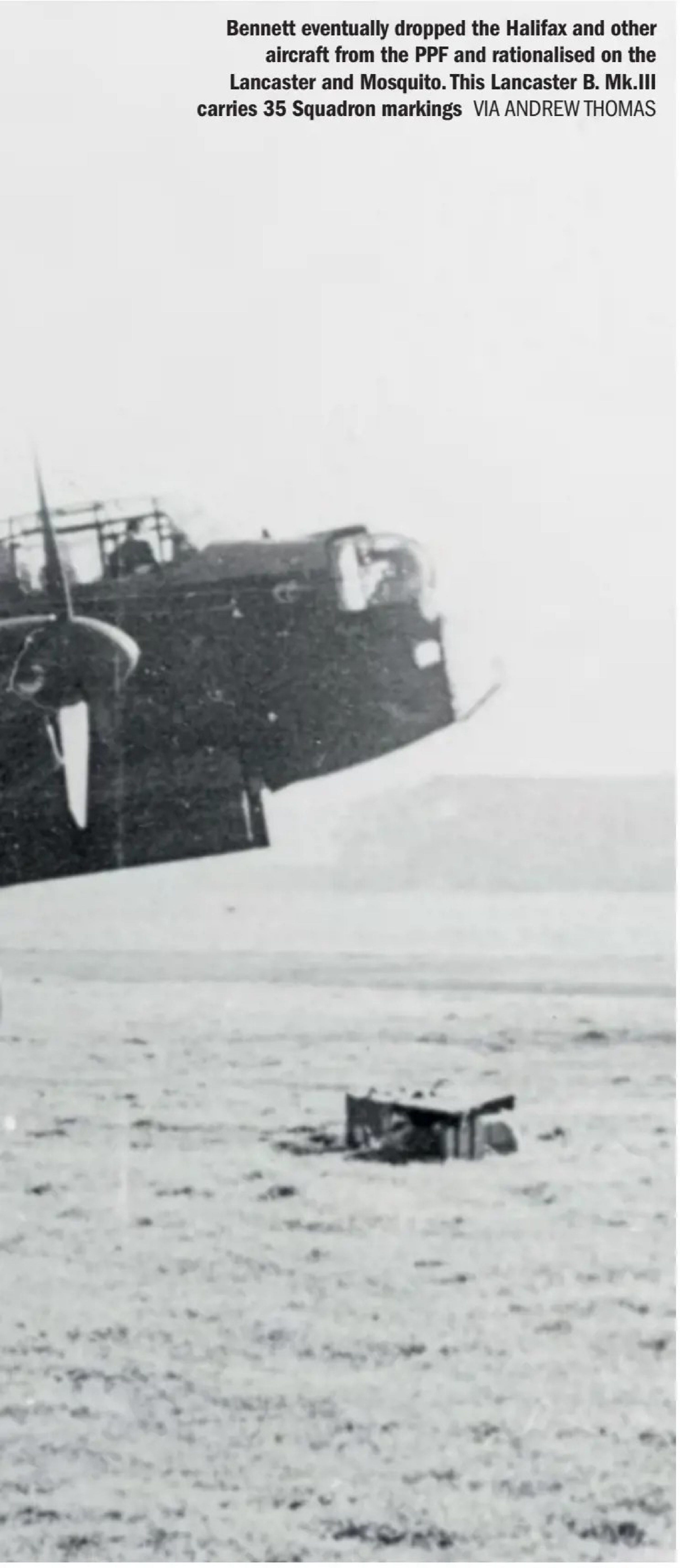
Over the target, all initially went well. The appointed Master Bomber, Squadron Leader Keith Cresswell, had little problem controlling the raid although thick cloud obliged Alec to dip beneath the blanket to start his marking run at well below the planned height.

Releasing his payload, his navigator gave him a new course to steer and then all hell broke loose. Their Lancaster was hit square in the still open bomb bay from beneath, and the aircraft almost immediately burst into flames – two Luftwaffe pilots made claims around this time, including Unteroffizier Kurt Stockbauer of 4./NJG4. Alec gave the order to bail out but before any of the crew could reach an escape hatch, the Lancaster broke up in the air, burning segments of fuselage and wing plunging to the ground near the French village of Reau, ten miles from the target.

Miraculously, wireless operator Wilfred Horner survived, having been thrown clear of the disintegrating aircraft and instinctively operating his parachute. His hands and legs were severely burned, but he was alive. He eventually reached home in May 1945.

Val Cranswick went on to have a son, Alexander, and learned of her husband's death two months after he was reported

Cranswick's experienced rear gunner, Ivor Howard, was convinced to join him on his fourth tour, but missed that ill-fated sortie due to medical reasons



Bennett eventually dropped the Halifax and other aircraft from the PPF and rationalised on the Lancaster and Mosquito. This Lancaster B. Mk.III carries 35 Squadron markings VIA ANDREW THOMAS

missing when his fate was quoted in an official German communiqué. At the time of his death he had completed 106 operations, including a Master Bomber trip in daylight on the flying bomb site at Oisemont, and behind the scenes his seniors had determined that he should be taken off operations at 110. He fell just a few operations short of safety.

While 106 sorties is the number that most sources agree upon, some claim Cranswick flew more with the numbers soaring to 147. Regardless, he was certainly among the most experienced airmen in the skies on the night of his death.

Cranswick the enigma

Alec Cranswick was something of a conundrum. He hated the thought of the terrible destruction that his bombs might cause, but recognised it was a means to an end. He took no pleasure in his job but was determined to execute any task given to him to his very best ability.

While tall, dark and good looking, he was nicknamed 'the flying tramp' – though this had more to do with the clothes that he donned while flying. Under his flying suit he wore civilian clothing in the hope that if he were to be shot down, it would give him a better chance of escaping. Others had done so already, and he hoped to replicate their success.

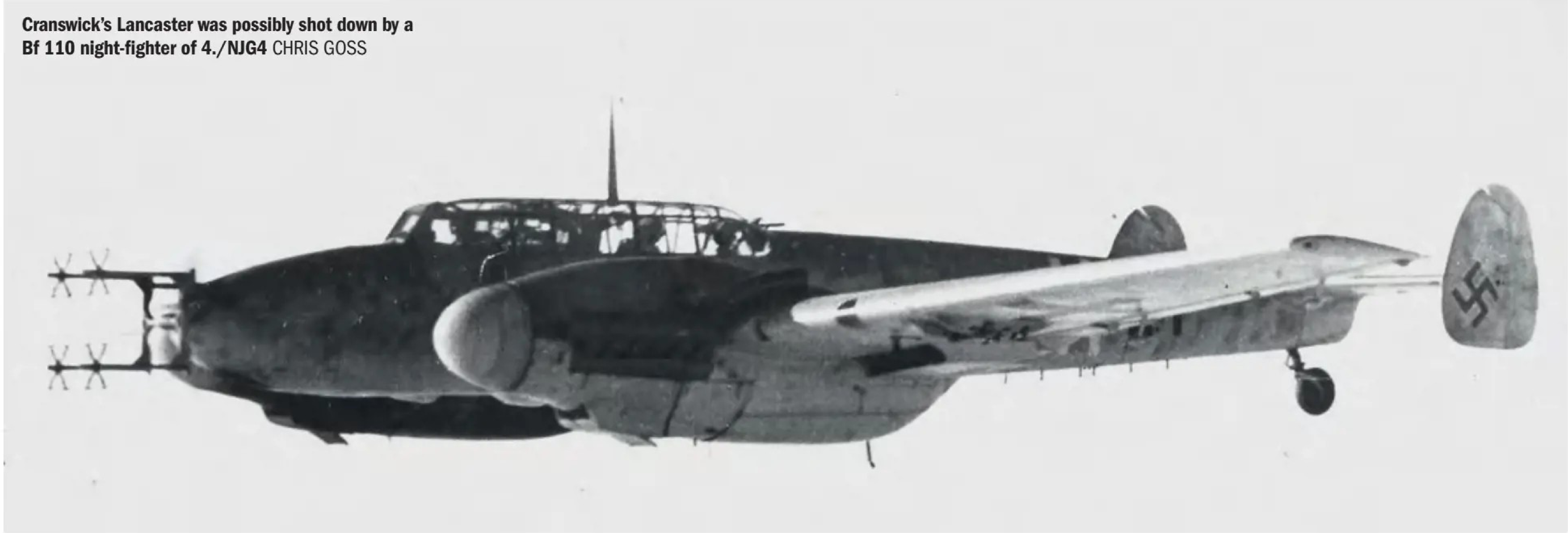
While some sought solace in a bottle, Alec was not a drinker, but neither did he regard those who did with disdain and would happily put money into a round for his crew to enjoy. He didn't partake, he would say, because he simply didn't like the taste. He was not a loner, but was similarly comfortable in his own company, with Val, or on walks in the countryside with Kluva. While attaining the rank of squadron leader, and being appointed a flight commander, he did not actively seek responsibility and abhorred paperwork. As his biographer Michael Cumming wrote in his book *Pathfinder Cranswick*: "Cranswick was entirely alien to the more usual conception of a hero. In truth, bravery in the air stemmed from no set mould – for there has never been a pattern for courage."

That may well be the case. Whatever his final operational tally, there are few if any who could claim to have been braver, and it irked his ultimate boss, Donald Bennett, that despite having flown possibly more operations than any other Bomber Command pilot, "the public had never heard of him".

> *"Whatever Alec's final operational tally, there are few if any who could claim to have been braver, and it irked his ultimate boss, Donald Bennett, that 'the public had never heard of him'"*

Squadron Leader Alec Cranswick is buried in the Clichy Northern Cemetery, France

Perhaps the last word should go to Group Captain Hamish Mahaddie – one of the most famous of all Pathfinder aircrew and himself a highly decorated officer. He wrote in his memoir *Hamish: the story of a pathfinder*: "Alec Cranswick was the perfect Englishman, quiet and retiring, but as a bomber captain in an exclusive class of his own." BW



Cranswick's Lancaster was possibly shot down by a Bf 110 night-fighter of 4./NJG4 CHRIS GOSS

An RAF corporal paints the 203rd bomb tally onto a Mosquito B Mk.IX of 105 Squadron. This aircraft, serial LR503, eventually completed 213 sorties – a Pathfinder and Bomber Command record
OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

BENNETT'S BEACONS

The Pathfinders gradually turned Bomber Command and its hit and miss efforts into a formation capable of delivering the combined payloads of more than 1,000 bombers onto a single target. John Ash unpicks the numbers behind the RAF's trailblazing elite

JUST 10% OF BOMBERS (AND 1% OF BOMBS) WITHIN 5 MILES OF THE TARGET

At the beginning of World War Two, Bomber Command was actively targeting German infrastructure, production and invasion capacity in daylight raids flown by light/medium bombers. With strike packages ranging from a few aircraft up to a few dozen, losses were startlingly high.

The RAF faced two choices; heavily escort raids, or shift to nocturnal operations. In the absence of any long-range fighter at that stage of the war, the latter was selected. Night bombing had distinct advantages, chiefly reducing losses, although enhanced ground radars as well as airborne sets equipping night-fighters would improve German defences.

Offsetting the advantages, it became more difficult to identify – let alone hit – targets. Dead reckoning, instrumentation and timing could bring a bomber force to its target but in the absence of distinctive landmarks and effective co-ordination, precision bombing from all raid participants was nigh impossible. Despite the optimism of bomber crews, the results were, well, off target. Lord Cherwell, chief scientific advisor to the War Cabinet, initiated a report.

Circulated on August 18, 1941, the Butt Report was scathing. Collated by economist David Bensusan-Butt, he examined aerial reconnaissance photographs of targets and compared his analysis to crew reports. Few had grasped how wide of the mark the bombs were falling. Even omitting aircraft that failed to bomb due to poor weather, visibility or equipment failure, the percentage that arrived within five miles of their targets varied from 66% over north France, down to 10% over the Ruhr. In a full moon, accuracy improved, but in moonless conditions just 6.5% of bombers found their targets. All-in-all, just 1% of bombs were falling close to the target.

A PREMIER RUGBY "FIRST 15"

It was hoped a concentrated force of specialists would facilitate better bombing by accurately identifying targets and marking them in advance of the main force. Group Captain (later Air Vice-Marshal) Sidney Bufton, Director of Bomber Operations, proposed massing navigational aids into a force of 'Target Finders' but found opposition from Bomber Command's C-in-C, Air Marshal Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, who argued that collating the most skilled crews would create unwanted rivalries and reduce morale. Harris proposed a series of bombing 'competitions' to encourage squadrons to improve. Another prominent scientist, Sir Henry Tizard, offered a striking rebuttal: "I do not think the formation of a first XV at rugby union makes little boys play any less enthusiastically."

The Air Ministry came down on the side of Bufton and Tizard – who were backed by the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal and by renowned physicist Reginald Victor Jones, whose reports were influential.

19 ELITE SQUADRONS OF RAIDERS

The coveted Pathfinder eagle worn by the airmen on their left tunic pocket
VIA ANDREW THOMAS

In August 1942, five bomber squadrons were transferred into the new Pathfinder Force (PFF), headed by Group Captain (later Air Vice-Marshal) Donald Bennett. First sortieing on August 18/19, the first few actions involving the PFF were not very successful. Its first major success was not long coming though, with precision marking over Kassel on August 27/28. An operation against Nuremberg the next night was equally effective with approximately 33% of the main force bombing the city.

The PFF began with five squadrons – one from each existing Bomber Command group. Its first units were the Wellington-equipped 156 Squadron (from 1 Group), Wellingtons and Mosquitos of 109 Squadron (2 Group), Stirlings of 7 Squadron (3 Group), Halifaxes of 35 Squadron (4 Group) and 83 Squadron's new Lancasters (5 Group). With more and larger raids being flown, eventually 19 squadrons transferred into the PFF (later 8 Group) – including the three squadrons operating within 5 Group from April 1944. The 14 added squadrons were 97, 105, 128, 139, 142, 162, 163, 405 (RCAF), 571, 582, 608, 627, 635 and 692 Squadrons.

In addition to conventional bombloads, PFF aircraft carried marking equipment, including Target Indicator (TI) Aircraft Candles (which projected alternately coloured flare pellets), the No.1 TI bomb, No.7 multi-flash bomb, the No.8 spotfire bomb and 4,000lb 'Pink Pansy' TI bomb. These devices dispensed colour-coded flares to designate the run-in to and/or the target.

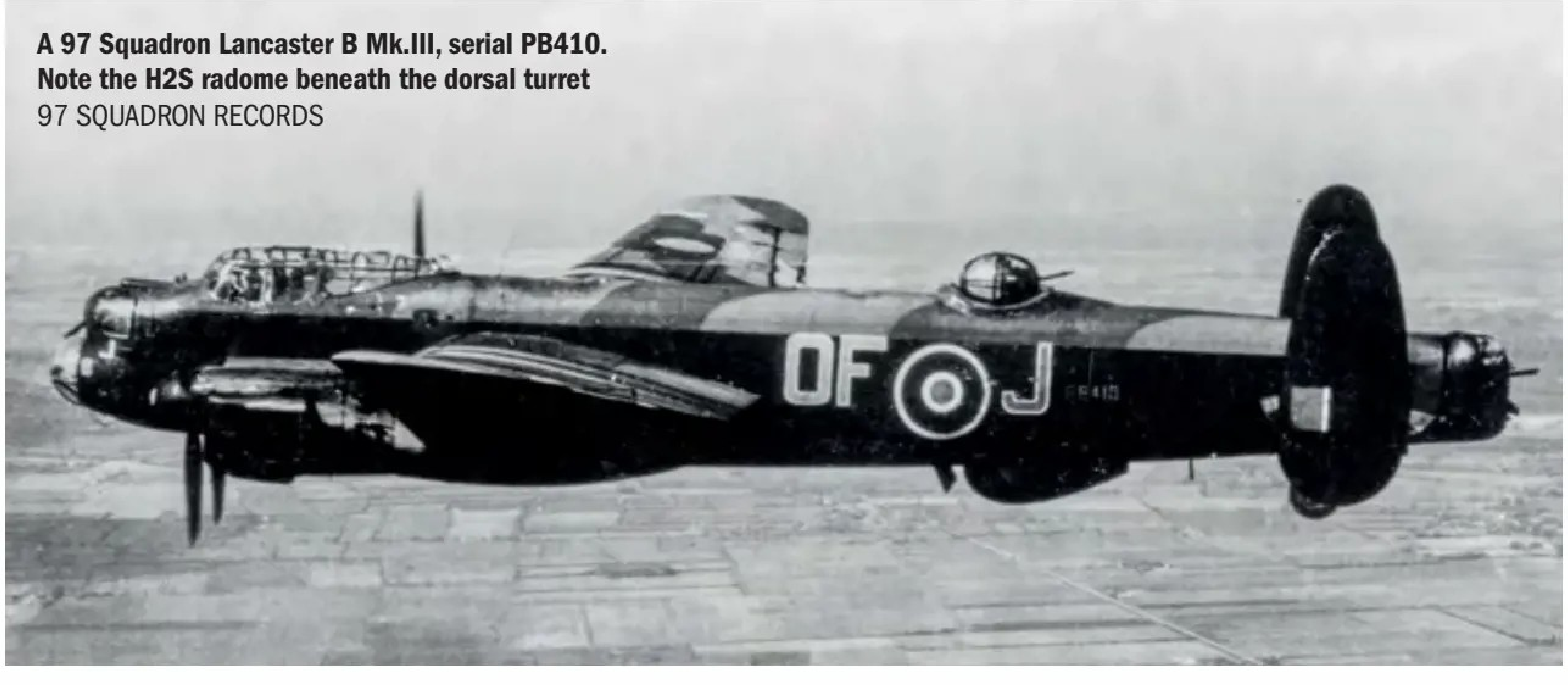
Pathfinder crews were highly experienced, and each had received considerable additional training to qualify for the coveted 'Pathfinder eagle' brooch. The PFF's heavy bombers also commonly carried an additional navigator, and recently qualified crews usually began their PFF careers by supporting target marking operations. PFF bombers later received high-frequency wireless sets enabling them to communicate with other raid participants.

STANDARDISING ON 2 ICONIC TYPES

When first formed, the PFF operated several types but by January 1943, when the force became 8 Group, it had rationalised to the Mosquito and Lancaster.

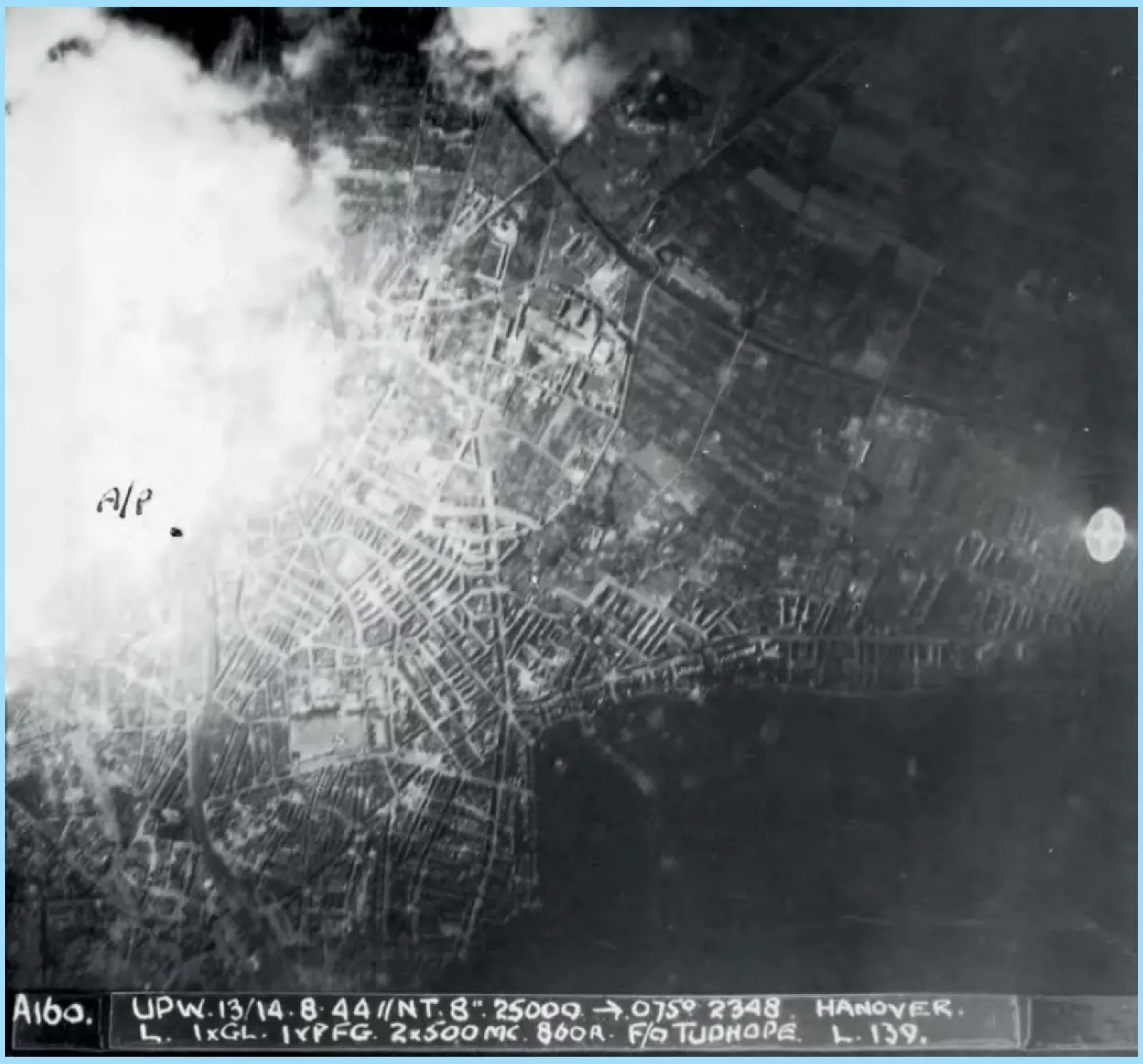
As the PFF grew, it made sense to standardise, streamlining training, maintenance and logistics. It also meant PFF squadrons operated aircraft of equal capability and characteristics. The Lancaster and Mosquito were the most versatile aircraft available to the PFF, which often introduced new equipment.

Both had distinct qualities suiting the Pathfinders, with the Mossie's speed, range and impressive bombload making it ideal for harassing/diversionary raids and meteorological reconnaissance. The aircraft also became the core component of the PFF's Light Night Striking Force.


A 97 Squadron Lancaster B Mk.III, serial PB410. Note the H2S radome beneath the dorsal turret
97 SQUADRON RECORDS

The Lanc's toughness, cavernous, unimpeded bomb bay and superior ceiling made it less vulnerable and able to carry diverse payloads in addition to TI and navigation equipment.

4 NEW METHODS OF DELIVERING DAMAGE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A160.
UPW.13/14.8.44 // NT. 8". 25000 → 075° 2348 HANOVER.
L. 1xGL. 1xPFG. 2x500MC. 860A. F/O TUDHOPE. L.139.

Initially, it was the light of TI flares illuminating the target that increased precision but later the indicators themselves became the aim point. Note the possible illumination flare falling to the far right of the marked aim point VIA ANDREW THOMAS

Meanwhile, new techniques countered specific problems, such as creep back, where PFF bombers would drop accurately but once the TI flares had burned out, following aircraft would use the edge of the firestorm as their marker, and each would drop successively earlier as the conflagration spread – the effect was similar to a walking barrage, but in reverse.

To counter creep back and reduce the number of bombers veering off target or becoming lost, the PFF placed markers along the run and at turning points along the route. 'Illuminators' maintained these and ensured the target was correctly identified, other Pathfinders marked the target/aim point, and a third group released incendiaries to ensure a large blaze engulfed the target. First employed on September 4/5, 1942, the technique proved successful.

However, poor weather and spoofing could reduce accuracy. To counter German spoofing, the colour and combinations of TI flares used would change nightly. Skymarking offered a solution to the weather – this used airburst TI bombs to identify the aiming point when the target was obscured. While this enabled all-weather bombing, it was less accurate as flares could drift while the target's position could not be used to check the approach.

New advanced navigation systems were particularly useful for blind marking. Three main variants of blind marking were used: 'Parramatta' (for good visibility of the target), 'Newhaven' (moderate visibility) and 'Wanganui' (minimal).

Gee was the first hyperbolic navigation system to enter service and remained in RAF use until 1970. Originally a landing aid, it was realised it had utility for bombing as it measured the time delay between two radio signals to produce a fix. The subsequent Gee-H produced a spot mark to navigate toward rather than track moving aircraft or formations.

Meanwhile, Oboe paired radar tracking with radio transponders to create an all-weather aid. It relied on two separated radar stations – 'cat' and 'mouse' – with two circles centred on the stations drawn on charts. The intersection point, where the two circles met, was the target. This method enabled a raid to be tracked and the range to the target to be gauged. Bombers navigated by the signals of one radar station and dropped their payload on picking up the signals of the second at the intersection point. Oboe could also be used to send short, coded messages to the bomber force.

Both Gee and Oboe were relatively short-ranged, so for operations ranging out more than 350 miles, H2S was used. This was the first airborne, ground-scanning radar and was effective at detecting terrain features at considerable distance, making it a useful all-weather navigation tool.

When H2S was first used by the Pathfinders on February 11/12, 1943, on Wilhelmshaven, its impact was immediately visible: bombing a completely obscured target via sky marking, the follow-up force observed a huge explosion pierce the cloud layer and linger for several minutes – a naval ammunition depot had been hit accurately and destroyed.

Finally, the PFF began to use Master Bombers, who, during their time over the target, would continually circulate target information to the main force over the wireless, calling up fresh Pathfinders to re-mark a target if needed. While important work, it left Master Bombers vulnerable to flak and night-fighters, as they were required to circle the target area, alone, flying a predictable pattern.

On the route in, Master Bombers and their deputy were responsible for shepherding the whole bomber stream along its intentionally indirect path toward the target. They also gauged conditions such as wind speed or increment weather, passing that detail on so the route or aim point could be adjusted and those changes signalled to the rest of the bomb force.

When combined, the creep back counter, skymarking techniques, blind marking devices and the use of Master Bombers could yield impressive results far more precise and more devastating than Bomber Command's early war efforts – all while co-ordinating much larger raids that sometimes included upwards of 1,000 heavy bombers, often sortied against better-defended and/or more distant targets.

Perhaps the best example of the greater impact of more effective bombing is the August 17/18, 1943, raid on the research centre at Peenemünde, where 596 bombers directed by PFF aircraft delayed Germany's V2 programme by several months.

13.2% OF ALL BOMBER COMMAND SORTIES

The scale of Bomber Command's mission was substantial. According to the International Bomber Command Centre, 1,000,000 personnel supported its operations, and the thin end of that wedge were the 125,000 airmen. More than 44% of them were killed, the highest rate of attrition of any Allied unit.

While many question the overall success of strategic bombing, it certainly had victories, and the nightly presence of British bombers hampered industry and forced the Germans to keep hundreds of fighter aircraft and thousands of heavy guns in the Riech's interior instead of supporting its operations at the front.

Of the 55,000 Bomber Command dead from 126 squadrons, 3,700 were from the 19 PFF squadrons. Pathfinders flew more than 51,053 sorties from a total of 392,137 operational Bomber Command sorties. The Light Night Striking Force alone flew 27,200.

Three Pathfinders received the VC – all posthumously: Squadron Leaders Ian Bazalgette (635 Squadron), Robert Palmer (flying with 582 Squadron) and Major Edwin Swales (582 Squadron).

A 692 Squadron Mosquito Mk.IV, serial DZ637, in 1944. The 'Wooden Wonder'; was a valuable asset to the PFF 692 SQUADRON RECORDS

1 REDOUBTABLE (SECOND CHOICE!) LEADER

The PFF was commanded by Air Vice-Marshal Donald Bennett, an Australian who in 1943, aged 33, became the youngest officer promoted to that rank. From his early RAAF days, Bennett specialised in long-range flying and navigation, and in 1936 published *The Complete Air Navigator*, releasing a seventh edition in 1967. He also held several aviation records and helped develop now standard practices such as air-to-air refuelling.

Early in World War Two, Bennett's remarkable expertise underpinned the work of the Atlantic Ferry Organisation, responsible for delivering thousands of aircraft across the Atlantic at a time when trans-Atlantic flights were relatively new. He then oversaw the formation of the Elementary Air Navigation School in Eastbourne and in December 1941 was given command of 77 Squadron. When that unit transferred to Coastal Command, Bennett was reassigned to 10 Squadron and led a raid against the German battleship *Tirpitz* during which he was shot down, but evaded capture.

Pathfinder CO Air Vice Marshal Don Bennett (right) leaving the Bentley Priory headquarters OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

In July 1942, Bennett was appointed to lead the PFF, but the Air Ministry's first choice was Air Vice-Marshal Basil Embry. Embry's move was blocked by Harris, and he went on to lead 2 Group.

Harris described Bennett as "the most efficient airman I have ever met", but added "he could not suffer fools gladly, and by his own high standards there were many fools". He clashed with other commanders, particularly 5 Group's Sir Ralph Cochrane, but though somewhat unpopular with his crews, he commanded respect and got it in spades – at a 1977 reunion of RAAF Pathfinders the chairman told him: "Don, you were a hard bastard, but we loved you." Moreover, he was technically minded, making him well-versed in the challenges faced by the PFF.

Bennett was the only Bomber Command commander not to be knighted, despite his achievements and those of his men. He resigned in favour of a life in politics and in the airlines but became one of the shortest-serving MPs after he was elected in the 1945 Middlesbrough West by-election, to lose his seat 73 days later in the general election. His attempts to be re-elected in 1948, 1950 and 1967 were unsuccessful and in 1974 he stood against Prime Minister Ted Heath in Sidcup, but finished last.

Bennett died on September 15, 1986, aged 76. His autobiography, *Pathfinder*, was published in 1958.

Fallen Lions

As the 2025 British and Irish Lions tour to Australia kicks off, and excitement builds for the first test, **John Ash** uncovers the stories of the Lions who gave their lives in both world wars – and discovers the list of fallen may be longer than officially recorded

The Lions team before the 4th test match against Argentina in August 1927. Among that tour's squad were servicemen Lion #207 Robert Kinnear and Lion #230 Sir Carl Aarvold UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER

Several players selected for the 1899 Lions squad later served in World War One, with Lion #66 Charlie Adamson and Lion #85 Blair Swannell killed UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER

May 8, 2025, and excitement gripped fans of rugger worldwide. Live from London's O2 Arena, British and Irish Lions head coach Andy Farrell, and chair Ieuan Evans MBE, named England's Maro Itoje, Lion #825, as the 47th Lions captain, and revealed the 38-player four-nations squad.

Just a few miles from Westminster Abbey, where not two hours before King Charles III and Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer joined distinguished guests to observe VE Day 80's solemnities, the rapturous Lions announcement carried poignant timing — several of their forebears had died in the world wars.

Thanks to rugby's ability to forge any player (regardless of body type) into a core part of the matchday 23 – plus its character-building emphasis on physicality, discipline and teamwork – the sport has long been considered ideal preparation for military training. It is unsurprising, then, that many players adapted to military life when their nations required them to represent them in an altogether different manner.

Valour forged on the pitch

Lions' tours began in 1888 – though the Lions' name was adopted later, in 1950. The first 249-day tour of Australasia saw England forward Robert Seddon, Lion #11, captain a British Isles team to win 27 of 35 fixtures. Seddon died in a boating accident and the captaincy passed to Andrew Stoddard, Lion #13, a winger who also led the first Barbarians team and has the unique accolade of captaining England in three sports: cricket, rugby union and Oz rules football.

The Lions were undefeated on their 1891 South Africa tour and won three of four tests in 1896. Men from both campaigns served in World War One, as did players on the successful 1899 Australia and subsequent tours. Among them was Frederick Belson, Lion #68, a lieutenant in the Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry during the Second Boer War, likely seeing action at Ladysmith and at Spion Kop. He returned home an invalid but in World War One re-enlisted. Scrumhalf and 1896 captain Matthew Mullineux, Lion #63, served as a chaplain in South Africa and returned to the army in World War One. He received the MC in May 1918 after taking command of an aid post in France. Despite 12 hours of shelling and gas attacks, he cared for the wounded and supervised their evacuation.

Lion #77, England flanker Frank Stout, played 21 matches and scored four tries in the 1899 tour and selected again 1903. He joined the 20th Hussars as a second lieutenant, later being promoted to lieutenant and serving in the Machine Gun Corps. In 1916, knowing German troops were edging close to a trench, he collected a Lewis gun and lifted a corporal onto his shoulders to fire on the advancing Germans at just 30 yards. The pair swapped, and in all killed at least 14 enemy.

The 1903 South Africa tour ended in defeat, but Scotland back (Sir) Louis Greig, Lion #103, later joined the navy and in 1909 met Prince Albert (later King George VI) as both trained (Greig as a surgeon). They served together before Greig transferred to the Royal Marines in 1914 and was captured. Released by a POW exchange, Greig joined the battleship *Malaya* in 1917. Both men joined the RAF and Greig served as the Prince's equerry. In 1939, he re-joined the RAF as a group captain.

In 1904, the Lions beat Australia three times but lost to New Zealand. Participating Welsh back and drop goal supremo Tommy Vile, Lion #122, served in both world wars. An Anglo-Welsh squad returned to the region in 1908, losing two and drawing one with New Zealand.

The 1910 South Africa tour was preceded by the Combined British tour of Argentina – Los Pumas' first internationals. The Lions defeated them six times and the team included New Zealand-born England winger Alex Palmer, Lion #163, who received the OBE as a major and the surgical head of No.32 Stationary Hospital. The official South Africa tour ended in

> *"Thanks to rugby's ability to forge any player into a core part of the matchday 23... the sport has long been considered ideal preparation for military training."*

The Lions and the All Blacks scramble for a loose ball at a test match in Dunedin, New Zealand, June 1908 SIR GEORGE GREY/ AUCKLAND LIBRARIES

THE ENGLISH RUGBY TEAM - ON THE
R.M.S. AVON - ON THEIR WAY TO THE ARGENTINE.

The Lions team (captioned as "English") en route to the unofficial 1910 Argentina tour UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER

British Rugby Football Team, South Africa, 1910.
WATSON & Co.
CAPE TOWN

Signed photograph of the official Lions 1910 South Africa tour team UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER

defeat, but Charles Timms OBE, Lion #193 – an Australian-born Scottish centre – became one of the most decorated Lions. As a Royal Army Medical Corps' officer, he received the MC and three Bars for tending to wounded men under fire – and is one of just four men to receive four MCs.

William Tyrrell OBE, Lion #192, is another high-flying Lion with links to the monarchy. The Belfaster served in the army and RAF, rising to air vice-marshal. He received the DSO & Bar, MC, was Mentioned in Despatches six times, and in 1939 became honorary surgeon to George VI. In 1922, he gave evidence to a War Office enquiry into 'shell shock', which he suffered from himself.

Tom Richards, Lion #195, won gold with Australia at the 1908 London Olympiad and was selected for the 1910 tour, playing 12 matches. In 1914, he volunteered for the Australian Imperial Force and landed at Gallipoli on the first day of the campaign on April 25, 1915. Later serving on the Western Front, he was commissioned as a lieutenant and received the MC in August 1917. The Tom Richards Cup, contested by the Lions and Australia since 2001, is named for him. Currently, both teams have one title each.

Giving their all in the field

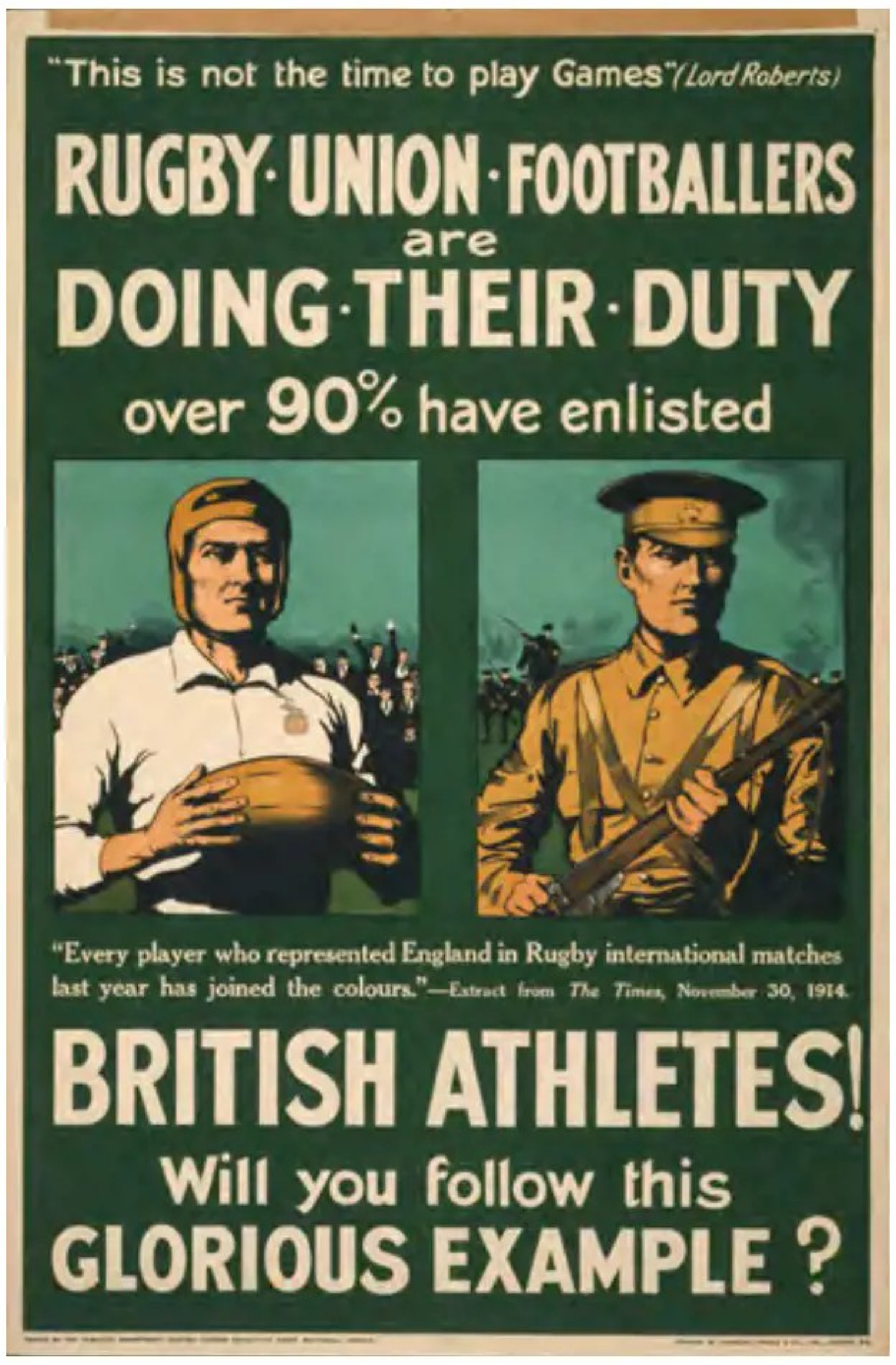
With regular national and international fixtures suspended in both world wars (the last pre-war Lions tours held in 1910 and 1938), rugby had to transition from pitch to field – highly successfully, if a World War One recruitment poster is taken at face value. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has established that 185 capped international players were killed in both wars. By 1914, many of the 199 Lions were still of fighting age and Lions former and future saw major fighting. At least 11 Lions fell between 1914-18.

The first was Lion #108, Sidney Crowther. A forward on the 1904 tour with one try in 18 games, he was a wartime despatch rider and, while a corporal with the 2nd Signal Troop, Royal Engineers, was killed near L'Epinette, Armentières on October 18, 1914.

The lowest-numbered player killed was Alexander Todd, Lion #59. The England forward was selected for the 1896 tour and featured in all four tests. Todd had already served in the Second Boer War and became a captain in the 4th Battalion, Norfolk Regiment in 1902. In 1914, he was deployed to the Western Front and was killed in the effort to capture Hill 60 in April 1915. He was wounded, probably on April 19 – when the 1st Norfolks went into the line – and died on April 21. Todd lies in the Poperinge Old Military Cemetery, and suggestions he is mistakenly named on the Menin Gate (where soldiers without known graves are

Richards
1917

Lion #195 and Olympian Tom Richards in army uniform, 1917. The trophy contested by the Lions and Australia since 2001 is named in his honour UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER


"This is not the time to play Games" (Lord Roberts)
RUGBY·UNION·FOOTBALLERS
are
DOING·THEIR·DUTY
over 90% have enlisted
"Every player who represented England in Rugby international matches last year has joined the colours."—Extract from The Times, November 30, 1914.
BRITISH ATHLETES!
Will you follow this
GLORIOUS EXAMPLE ?

The World War One British poster propagandising the efforts of the nation's rugby players US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

commemorated) appear to be false or the error has been corrected.

Northampton Saints number 8, Lion #85 Blair Swannell, was selected for the 1899 and 1904 tours, scoring twice in 32 games. He served as a lieutenant in the British Army during the Second Boer War, after which he joined the Australian Army. Promoted to major, Swannell landed with the 1st Battalion, AIF, at Anzac Cove on the first day of the Gallipoli landings but was killed by a sniper. Lion #125, Bath forward

> *"By 1914, many of the 199 Lions were still of fighting age and Lions former and future saw major fighting. At least 11 Lions fell between 1914-18"*

Ron Rogers, who also played on the 1904 tour, was killed at Gallipoli on June 28, 1915. Gallipoli also claimed David Bedell-Sivright, Lion #86, a Scotland forward picked for the 1903 tour and who captained the 1904 campaign, playing 21 Lions matches, scoring six tries, a conversion and two drop goals. A navy surgeon, Bedell-Sivright was bitten by an insect and fell ill. Evacuated to a hospital ship, he succumbed to septicaemia on September 5.

Cardiff winger Johnnie Williams, Lion #140, joined the 1908 Lions tour, scoring 12 tries in 20 matches. Fittingly, he retired in 1911, as Wales's top scorer. In September 1914, he enlisted and was soon a second lieutenant in the 16th Battalion Welsh Regiment. By March 1915, he was a captain, and in July 1916 fought at the Battle of the Somme. On July 7, the Germans attacked Williams' position in Mametz Wood and he was wounded, dying five days later.

Scrumhalf and Scotland captain Eric Milroy, Lion #198 went missing on July 18, 1916. The 1910 tour veteran and Black Watch lieutenant was involved in fighting around Longueval, near Delville Wood. Nor is much known of Lion #105, Jimmy Hosack's fate, other than that he died on July 20 at Kangata, during the East Africa campaign. Hosack appeared in four Lions' fixtures in 1903, scoring one try.

Newport forward Phil Waller, Lion #186, stayed in South Africa after playing 23 matches in the 1910 tour. He enlisted in the 71st Siege Battery, South African Heavy Artillery, and was killed near Arras on December 14, 1917. The 28-year-old lieutenant had been granted leave and was waiting in a car when it was struck by shellfire. Fellow Wales player, flyhalf Noel Humphreys, Lion #196, died of wounds on March 27, 1918. Humphreys served as captain in the Tank Corps, earning the MC. His citation read: "His tank becoming stranded, [Humphreys] commenced to dig it out, and though wounded, completed his task and continued in action the whole day." During the 1910 tour, he appeared in five games, scoring two conversions and a penalty.

Lion #66 Charlie Adamson was killed on September 17, 1918. The England scrumhalf was a prolific kicker on the 1899 tour, appearing in 20 matches and scoring eight tries, 35 conversions, three drop goals and ten penalties. Later a captain in the Royal

THE LION VC'S

Lion #53 Thomas Crean VC during World War One, the forward was one of two Lions to earn the VC during the Second Boer War OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

Of the four rugby union internationals to earn the VC, two were Lion #53, Thomas Crean and Lion #54, Robert Johnston. Both played the 1896 tour and remained in South Africa, later serving in the Imperial Light Horse during the Second Boer War.

Forward Crean was the team's vice-captain and considered the break-out player of the tour. The Irishman played every game, later wearing the captain's armband when captain Johnny Hammond was injured. He was a doctor in Johannesburg when the war began and enlisted, taking part in the reliefs of Mafeking and Ladysmith. He was wounded at the Battle of Elandslaagte and earned his VC on December 18, 1901, as a surgeon captain, at the Battle of Tygerskloof. Invalided in February 1902, Crean received his VC from King Edward VII in March. He later received the DSO in World War One. His VC citation read: "During the action at Tygerskloof, this officer continued to attend to the wounded in the firing line under a heavy fire at only 150 yards range, after he himself had been wounded – and only desisted when he was hit a second time, and as it was first thought, mortally wounded."

Irish winger and forward Robert Johnston was an experienced soldier having served with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers before the Lions' tour. He was severely wounded at Ladysmith and distinguished himself at Elandslaagte, where he earned the VC. He received the medal from Edward VII in July 1901. Captain Johnston's citation is a joint one, as Captain Charles Mullins also received the VC for the same action. It read: "On October 21, 1899, at Elandslaagte, at a most critical moment – the advance being momentarily checked by a very severe fire at point-blank range – these two officers very gallantly rushed forward under heavy fire and rallied the men, thus enabling the flanking movement, which decided the day, to be carried out." As an aside, Mullins was the brother of Lion #64, Cuthbert Mullins.

An informal portrait of three Australian officers of the 1st Battalion, AIF, in Egypt, March 1915. Centre is Lion #85, Blair Swannell AWM

Scots Fusiliers, he was killed in the Fourth Battle of Doiran on the Macedonian front.

Interwar warriors

The first interwar Lions tour was 1924's expedition to South Africa, the Springboks winning three of four tests. While not adopted until 1950, the 'Lions' name was first coined on this tour. By now, many Lions were war veterans, including England lock (Sir) Arthur Blakiston, Lion #200, an MC-earning Royal Field Artillery officer.

Lion #203 Stanley Harris CBE served in both conflicts. The England winger was born in the Cape Colony and called up for the 1924 Lions tour, scoring in two tests. He had served in the Imperial Light Horse but was commissioned in the Royal Field Artillery in 1915. Wounded at the Battle of the Somme, Harris took up ballroom dancing to ease his recovery and reached the finals of the World Ballroom Dancing Championship. Harris was later the second-in-command of the 148th Field Artillery and was captured in Singapore in 1942. Promoted to lieutenant-colonel in captivity, in April 1943 he was appointed senior officer in 'F Force'. This group of 7,000 POWs were used as labourers in Siam and Burma, with 3,100 dying due to lack of supply, disease and neglect. Harris once prevented 700 men from being abandoned in the jungle.

(Sir) Carl Aarvold, Lion #230, is described "one of the most prolific wingers" but is best known for his work as presiding judge at the trial of the Kray Twins. A veteran of the 1927 and 1930 tours, he scored eight tries in four tests vs Argentina in 1927, and three in the series defeat to New Zealand in 1930. He later served in the Royal Artillery, becoming a (temporary) lieutenant-colonel and receiving the OBE.

Number 8 Frank 'Doug' Prentice, Lion #276, was the 1930 tour captain and scored a try, 13 conversions and seven penalties in 12 matches. The 239-time capped Leicester Tigers stalwart also managed the 1936 tour. He was wounded at Passchendaele in 1917 and, as a lieutenant-colonel, was captured in World War Two.

Lion #258, (Sir) Douglas 'Joe' Kendrew, also toured in 1930 and went on to captain England and the Army teams. In the 1935 Army-Navy game the team had to play with a six-man scrum due to injuries. Kendrew, a prop, helped secure a hard-won 11-8 victory. He joined the army in 1930, was an instructor at Sandhurst and latterly served in North Africa, Italy, Greece and the Middle East, earning the DSO and two Bars. In Korea, he led the 29th Infantry Brigade, earning a rare fourth DSO. In 1958, having been promoted to major-general, he survived an assassination attempt by EOKA fighters in Cyprus.

The 1936 Argentina tour was significant, as the Lions' side was key in inspiring the growth of rugby there. It was a dominant

The Gallipoli landings and subsequent struggle inland claimed at least three Lion's lives AWM

Lion #66 Charlie Adamson kicks for the posts in the second test against Australia in 1899 STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND

Lion #258 Major-General Douglas 'Joe' Kendrew in Cyprus, June 1958 DAILY EXPRESS/GETTY

> *"Denys Dobson, Lion #123, 1904 tour veteran – and the first Lion to be sent off – was killed by a rhinoceros on July 10, 1916, in Nyasaland"*

performance, the Lions winning every game and conceding just 12 points. England lock Thomas 'Fred' Huskisson, Lion #285, went on to become a double MC recipient. Commissioned in the Duke of Wellington's regiment, in May 1940 he took replacements to France to reinforce the 1st Battalion but was evacuated. Deployed to Tunisia in 1943, he was hit in the head, remembering: "Blood spurted. Then four stretcher-bearers appeared. The rule was there should never be more than two to a casualty [so] I ticked them off and realised I could not be too badly hurt and carried on." Later, medics removed a large splinter. He received his first MC at Anzio, leading a spirited attack and holding the gains for six days against German armour. He received the bar in May 1944 after leading a bayonet charge through a minefield in Pantoni.

Brothers George and Charles Beamish played in the 1930 and 1936 tours, respectively. George, a prop, earned 118 caps for Leicester Tigers, 25 for Ireland, played for the Barbarians and went to Australasia as Lion #253 and featured in all five tests. His military career was also impressive, serving in the RAF between 1923-58, retiring as an air marshal. Younger brother Charles, Lion #278, a Tigers, Barbarians and Ireland prop, played nine matches on the 1936 tour. He also served in the RAF, rising to group captain.

Scottish centre Duncan Macrae, Lion #306, was selected for the 1938 tour, appearing in 11 matches and scoring four tries, a conversion and a drop goal. Serving as one of the 51st Highland Division's medical officers, he received the MC for his actions at Saint-Valery-en-Caux but was captured in June 1940. Lion #279 Vesey Boyle was more fortunate. The Irish winger had 17 Lions appearances in 1936 and 1938, scoring 15 tries. Enlisting in the Royal Artillery, he escaped Dunkirk before transferring to the RAF, flying 101 sorties and earning the DFC.

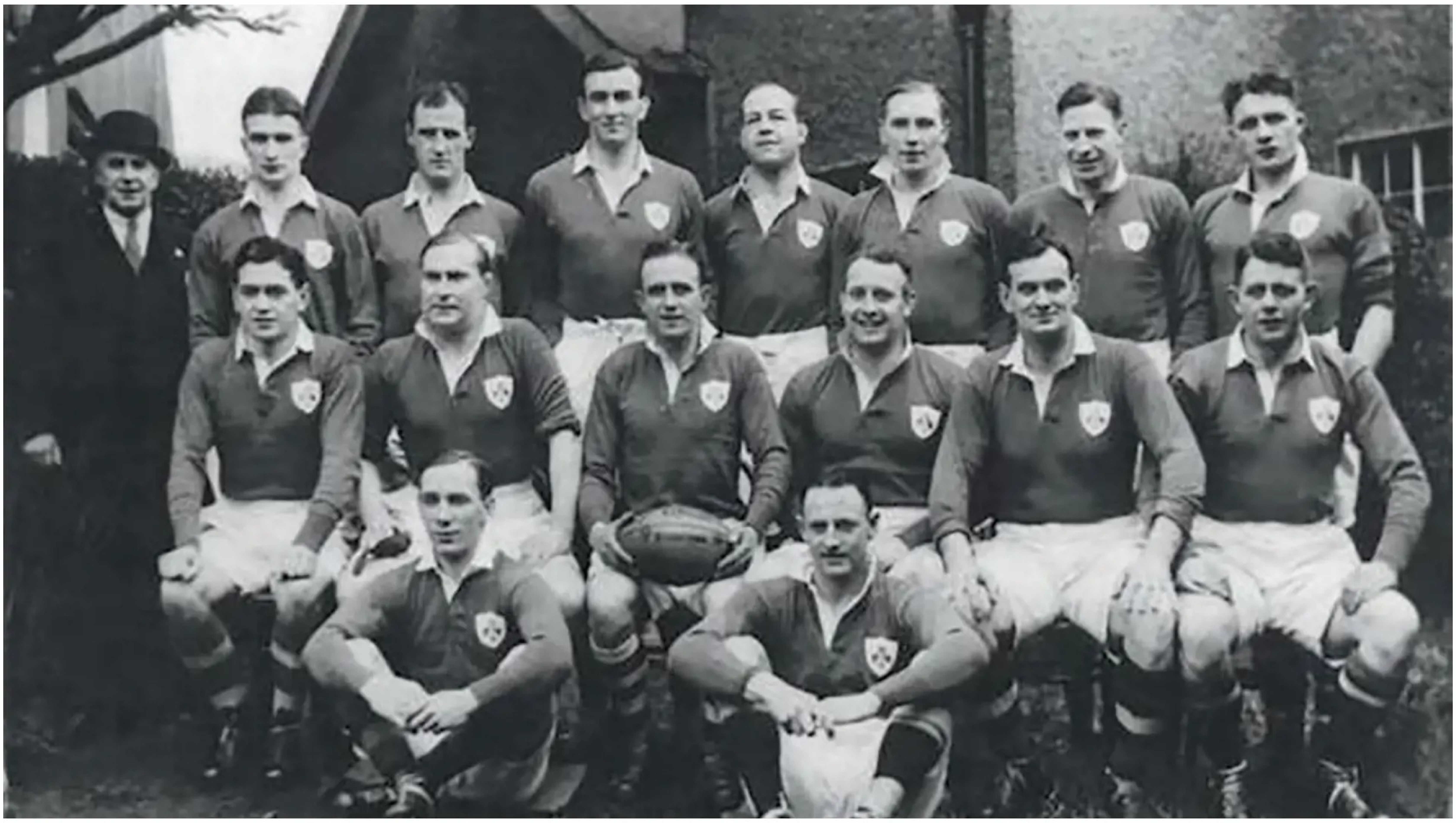
Scotland flyhalf Charles Grieve, Lion #320, scored the last four-point drop goal in Lions' history, playing nine fixtures in 1938, before serving in the King's African Rifles in World War Two and leading a company of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment in the Korean War.

Lost Lions?

Officially, three Lions were killed in World War Two. Brian Black, Lion #254, was a bobsleigh world champion and England lock who played five tests on the 1930 tour. He was a formidable kicker, scoring 77 points with his boot in 20 Lions games. Having joined the RAF, he died in a flying accident on July 29, 1940.

Lion #263, England second-rower Henry Rew was selected for the 1930 tour, playing five tests. During the final provincial match against Western Australia, he scored two tries in an impressive 71-3 win. Having joined the army, Rew rose to the rank of major and was serving with the 7th Royal Tank Regiment in Egypt when, on December 11, 1940, he died. Details are scarce, but it is thought he was in the decisive December 9 attack on Nibeiwa Fort and he died of his wounds.

Belfast-born flanker Robert Alexander, Lion #299, was an Ireland international and played all three tests on the 1938 tour, scoring six tries in 14 games. He joined the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, being promoted to captain in 1941. On July 19, 1943, he led an attack along the Simeto River, near Catania in Sicily when he



Lion #307 Blair Mayne (back, third right) and Lion #299 Robert Alexander (mid, far right) in the February 1938 Ireland line-up to play England UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER

was killed. He was 32, and had just told a fellow officer "It's suicide".

A fourth Lion, Robert Kinnear, Lion #207, died in a tragic incident. A Scot who played both codes, Kinnear, father and grandfather of British actors Roy and Rory Kinnear, played centre and appeared in all four tests on the 1924 tour. In 1927 he switched codes, earning 182 Wigan caps and scoring 81 tries. Kinnear played union for the RAF, as a centre, but died on the pitch during a service fixture on September 22, 1942.

However, overall Lions losses may be higher than stated. This article's findings require further investigation but suggest that two additional Lions fatalities were sustained in World War One.

Men of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment on 'the Hook' Korea, 1953. One company within the regiment was commanded by Lion #320 Charles Grieve TOPFOTO

> *"Whether on the official list or not, these fallen Lions were proud to give their all on the pitch and do the same on the battlefield"*

Belgian-born back John Raphael, Lion #164, was capped nine times by England and captained the unofficial 1910 tour. He later served in the King's Royal Rifle Corps and was commissioned as a lieutenant, but was injured at the Battle of Messines in June 1917 and died on June 11.

Meanwhile, Robertson Smyth, Lion #104, was an Ireland forward, two-time Barbarian and played 16 games in the 1903 tour. He enlisted in 1905 and became a Royal Army Medical Corps officer. Deployed to the Western Front, he was promoted to major in October 1915 but suffered from exposure and was sent home. He died in London on April 5, 1916, due to the lingering effects of exposure.

Denys Dobson, Lion #123, 1904 tour veteran – and the first Lion to be sent off – was killed by a rhinoceros on July 10, 1916, in Nyasaland. He worked there as a colonial officer, so may count among wartime losses.

A further three Lions appear to have been killed in World War Two. William Robertson CBE, Lion #181, was a forward on the 1910 tour. He served as a medical officer within the 1st Durham Volunteer Artillery and the 50th Division, serving in France for three years during World

Lion #164 John Raphael captained the unofficial 1910 tour and was killed during the Battle of Messines but appears to not have been recognised as a fallen lion BENDER & LEWIS

War One and earning the MC. Recalled in 1939, he deployed as a lieutenant-colonel in the Royal Army Medical Corps but was captured in France in 1940 and died in captivity on March 26, 1942.

Lion #284 Peter Hobbs was an English number 8 on the 1936 tour. He was killed, aged 31, on May 27, 1942, near Bir Hakeim, Libya, while serving as a brigade major in Royal Artillery, attached to the 7th Armoured Division. His tourmate Lion #295, John Moll, was a centre who played for the Barbarians and a long-serving member of the Territorial Army. In 1939 he joined the Royal Engineers and latterly the Queen's Royal Regiment, becoming a captain. On July 24, 1942, as his battalion prepared to deploy to Iraq, Moll died – officially, "of wounds received on active service".

Russian-born Alexander Obolensky – the 'Flying Slav' – was a Rurikid prince with British citizenship. Having spent most of his life in England after his family fled the Russian Revolution, he played for Oxford University and Leicester Tigers between 1934-39 and the Barbarians. The winger was selected for the 1936 tour as Lion #296, scoring 12 tries in just the six test matches. Obolensky joined the RAF and on March 28, 1940, was called up to join a wartime team to play Wales. The next day he died overshooting RAF Martlesham Heath's runway in his Hurricane. He was 24.

Whether on the official list or not, these fallen Lions were proud to give their all on the pitch and do the same on the battlefield. Having thrilled crowds playing a sport they loved, the Lions were committed to ensuring those they entertained could continue to be so in peacetime. It's something I'll keep in mind when watching Maro Itoje hopefully lift the Tom Richards Trophy. BW

LION OF THE SAS

Lion #307 Paddy Mayne is best known for his SAS activities but was also a formidable sportsman – although his reported off-pitch antics developed quite a reputation! MIRRORPIX/GETTY

Lieutenant-Colonel Blair 'Paddy' Mayne remains a legendary figure in the SAS and one of its most important commanders. However, he was also a celebrated sportsman, and selected for the 1938 tour as Lion #307.

Courageous, intelligent and enigmatic, but also tempestuous and turbulent with a fondness for boozing, Mayne stood at 6ft 3in and 15½ stone, making him a giant on the rugby pitch. The Northern Irish lock played all three tests against South Africa, losing the first two but after Mayne, the World Rugby Museum states, "put in the performance of his life", the Lions won the third 21-16.

Lion #460 Mike Gibson told the BBC: "In my early days with the Lions, Harry McKibben, another member of that 1938 tour, spoke to us about the huge role Blair Mayne had. He made a real impact on the field. He was a colossus, physically strong and imposing – and back then there were not as many huge rugby players."

Mayne became better known for his alleged antics off field, smashing up a hotel room in Pietmaritzburg, visiting docks to pick fights with sailors and stevedores, and returning to his accommodation late one night with the head of an antelope. In a bizarre escapade in Johannesburg, he reportedly freed a convict engaged in the construction of Ellis Park Stadium. After the third test, Mayne disappeared, only reappearing at the dockside at the team's departure for home.

Sports journalist Ciaran Donaghy wrote: "The tour was captained by Sammy Walker and nearly every day he had to go to the tour manager and plead for Blair to stay, as he knew his value. The South Africans thought he was one of the greatest forwards they'd ever seen, he was hard, abrasive and not afraid of taking retribution. He played in 20 of 24 games and in one of the two games against Rhodesia. He was the only forward not to score on the tour."

Mayne played a key part in Ireland's Five Nations campaign in 1939 where was denied the Triple Crown. These were his last caps. The rest, they say, is history. Mayne died in 1955, aged 40, in a road accident.

The 'Flying Slav' Lion #296 Alexander Obolensky transitions from winger to the wing as he sits in the cockpit of an RAF Miles Magister trainer, 1936 SMITH ARCHIVE/ALAMY

TRIUMPH *and* TRAGEDY

Britain's final aerial victory of World War Two, achieved in a stunning dogfight above Japan, was blighted by a despicable act

Words: **Andrew Thomas**

Although small by US Navy standards, the British Pacific Fleet (BPF) provided significant reinforcement in the Pacific. The fleet comprised no fewer than six fleet carriers and five battleships, as well as several light carriers and numerous cruisers, escort and support vessels and a combined strength of some 700-750 aircraft among its carrier air groups.

Commanded ostensibly by Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, with his subordinates Vice-Admiral Sir Bernard Rawlings leading the fleet and Vice-Admiral Sir Philip Vian heading up air operations, the fleet had amassed some 160 warfighting vessels at peak strength, the lion's share from the Royal Navy, but with Royal Australian, Royal Canadian, and Royal New Zealand Navy vessels among them. Cutting its teeth in the Dutch East Indies, the fleet moved

The A6M5 was probably the most capable of Japan's Zero fighters and toward the end of the war increasingly flew from land bases to defend the home islands. This example, given the addition of a star painted atop the Japanese roundel, is a captured airframe USN MUSEUM OF NAVAL AVIATION

Seafire L Mk.IIIs of 894 Squadron ranged on *Indefatigable* before another escort sortie C EARLE

into the Pacific and towards Japan in early 1945, playing a significant role in the invasion of Okinawa.

In mid-July 1945, the 1st Aircraft Carrier Squadron comprised the armoured carriers *Formidable, Victorious* and *Implacable,* and these joined the US Third Fleet off Japan as Task Force 37. Operations over the Japanese Home Islands began on July 17. A fourth British carrier, *Indefatigable,* joined three days later. Among her airwing were the Seafires of 887 and 894 Naval Air Squadrons. On August 11, with the Japanese on the verge of surrender, the Royal Navy's fleet carriers were withdrawn to Sydney – except for the newcomer, which was integrated into the US Navy's Third Fleet Fast Carrier Group.

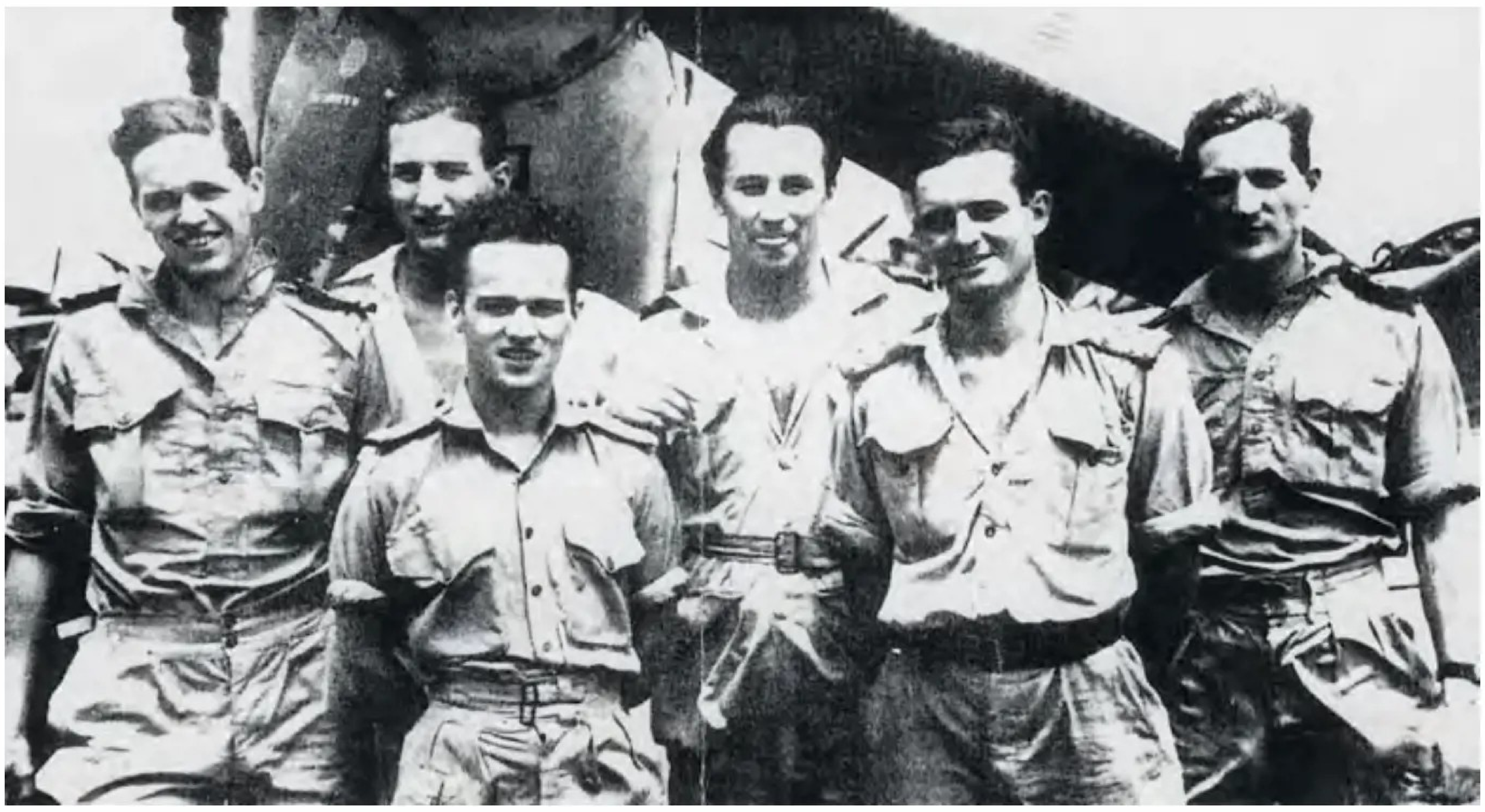
Bandits from behind

At dawn on August 15, *Indefatigable* launched Avengers and Fireflys, escorted by eight Seafire L Mk.IIIs of 887 and 894 Squadrons. The escorting fighters were led out by 22-year-old Sub Lieutenant Freddie Hockley, and the target for the raid was a chemical factory in Odaki Bay. Hockley's section of five provided the close escort, and Sub Lieutenant Vic Lowden of 887 Squadron led the three remaining Seafires to provide top cover.

At 0545hrs, as the aircraft crossed over the bay, a pair of A6M5 Zeros were seen below. However, it was suspected that these might be decoys, which rapidly proved to be the case. More than a dozen more Zeros, probably from the 302nd and 252nd *Kokutais,* were soon spotted diving on the British from behind. Probably due to a radio failure, Freddie Hockley did not react, and he was shot down on the first pass. He managed to bale out and landed on the Chiba Peninsula.

The Seafires engaged and, in LR866/S 121, Lowden put his flight in line abreast against the second enemy element. He later noted: "Eight striking aircraft in two group flights at three o'clock, 1,000ft above my flight – which was top cover. Four enemy aircraft behind and above from same direction, two decoys below." The Japanese peeled over to dive onto the Avengers but were swiftly attacked by Lowden's flight. The Zeros barely evaded when attacked, and Lowden found himself in the perfect position. Radioing a final warning, he dived on the rearmost Japanese formation. He opened fire with his cannon at the second Zero in from the right from about 800 yards, seeing his shells strike home that caused the undercarriage oleos drop, he recalled: "It flamed nicely going down."

Lowden's Number 3, Sub Lieutenant W 'Taffy' Williams, had also hit the aircraft with his burst, so the victory was shared. Lowden then switched fire to the aircraft on the extreme right, and, allowing a slight



ABOVE: ***Indefatigable's*** **successful Seafire pilots from the August 15, 1945, dogfight. From L to R: Sub Lieutenants Don Duncan (894 Squadron – two probable), Randy Kay (894 – one destroyed, one probable, one damaged), 'Spud' Murphy (887 – two destroyed), Vic Lowden (887 – two destroyed, one shared destroyed, two damaged), Ted Garvin (894 – one damaged) and 'Taffy' Williams (887 – one destroyed, one shared destroyed)** AUTHOR

deflection, fired three short bursts. He saw pieces fly off as the enemy fell away and blew up. Still Lowden was not done: "I then found one of the original *Zekes* climbing at 8,000ft and about 1,000 yards from me. I closed to 100 yards at 11,000ft, kicking on the rudder to have a look at the markings. I went back astern and fired a pair of two-second bursts of machine gun – my cannon being finished. I saw strikes all over the aircraft and the pilot baled, his aircraft diving past him, smoking."

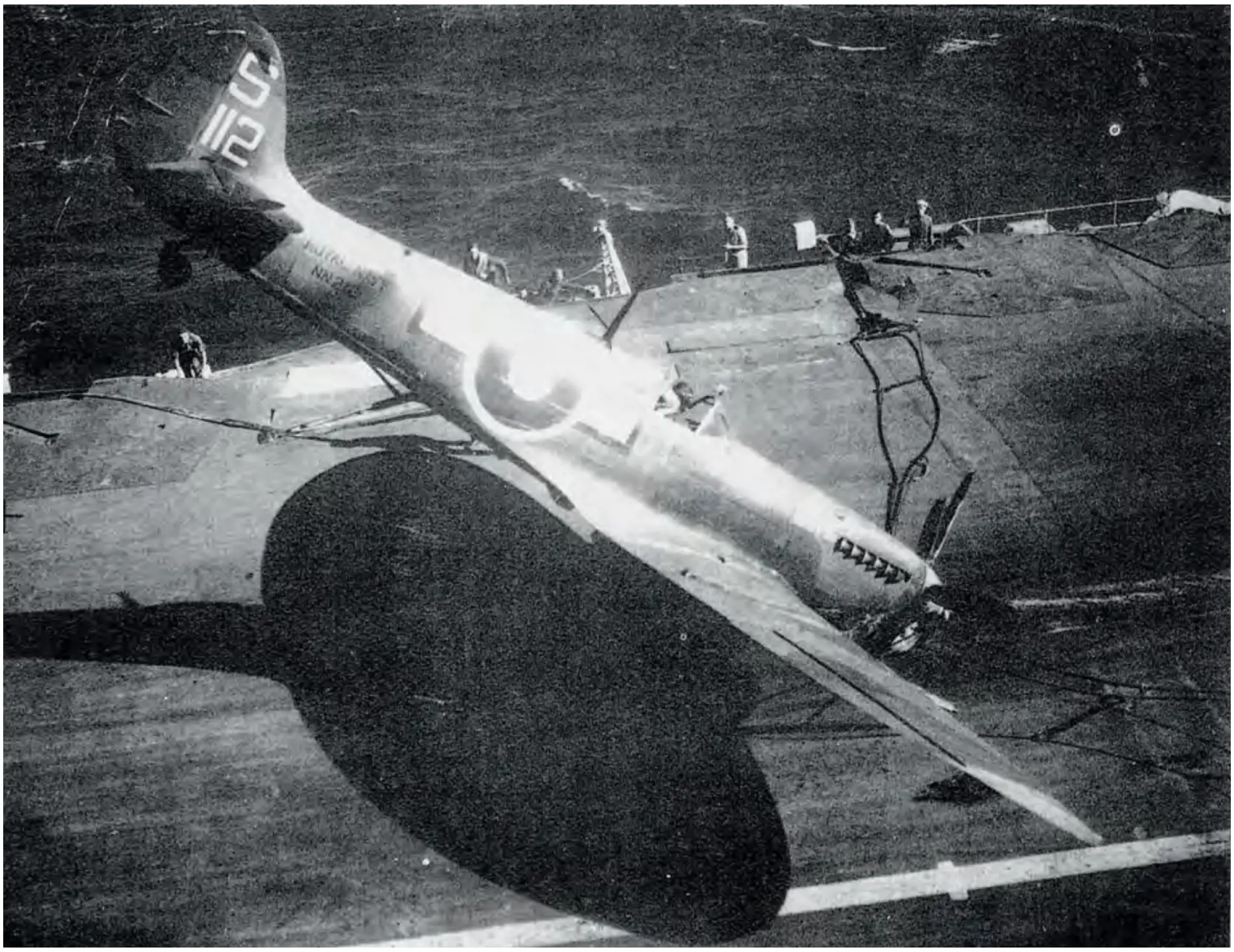
When his gun camera film was analysed, it was found Vic Lowden had hit five Zeros and he was credited with two destroyed and a third shared with Williams. The other two were given as damaged. Moreover, in addition to his share with Lowden, Williams had shot down another fighter.

No enemy unscathed

Sub Lieutenant Gerry 'Spud' Murphy, also of 887 Squadron, was flying Seafire NN212/S 112. He sighted and engaged three Japanese fighters at 12,000ft in a twisting combat descending down to 6,000ft.

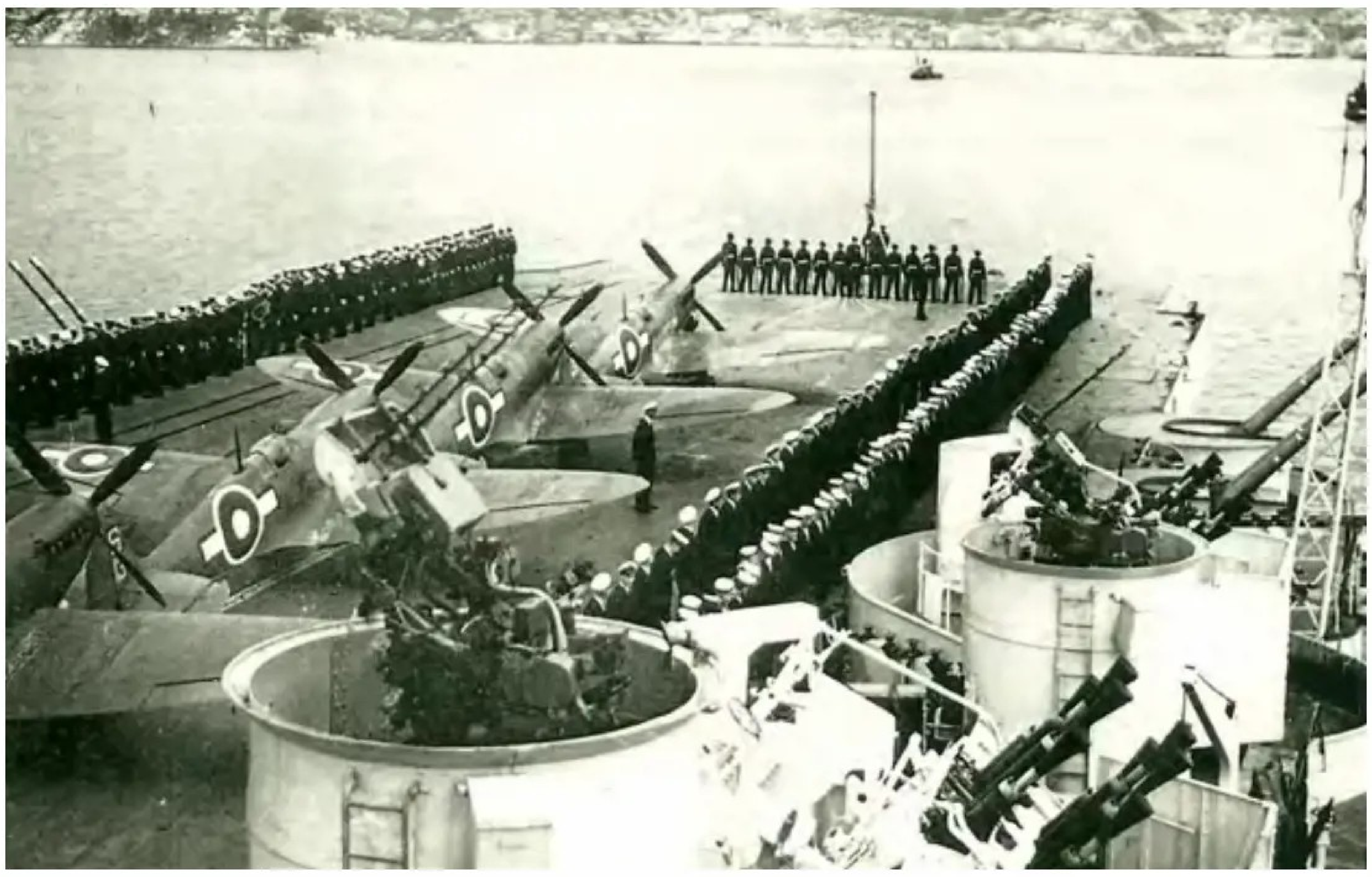
Murphy first opened fire with a three-second burst from 600 yards, later writing: "Opened fire on flight leader from enemy port quarter. Saw strikes on fuselage of enemy, which was finished off by flight leader or No 3. Disengaged from above to attack another *Zeke* to port and 500ft below. Closed from above and astern, obtaining hits on belly and engine. His undercart [undercarriage] fell down and smoke and flame were coming from engine, but I was closing too fast and overshot. I pulled up the nose to re-attack and saw lone *Zeke* at the same level doing a shallow turn to starboard. He evidently didn't see me, and I held fire 'til some 100 yards away. Observed immediate strikes on cockpit and engine, which burst into flames. Enemy rolled onto its back, plummeting into cloud."

However, despite the efforts of the escort, four Zeros managed to attack the Avengers. One of these was badly damaged before the 894 Squadron Seafires could intervene. Flying PR206, Sub Lieutenant Don Duncan preserved his manoeuvring speed and engaged three Zeros –



RIGHT: **Seafire L Mk.III, NN212/S 112, shown here after a rough landing, was flown by 'Spud' Murphy during the final air action of the war** C EARLE

LEFT: **Sub Lieutenant Hockley led the Seafire escort on August 15 and was shot down** S KERRIDGE



RIGHT: ***Indefatigable* in Wellington, New Zealand, November 1945. Post-war, she toured New Zealand, Australia and South Africa before returning home in March 1946. She was then refitted to accommodate passengers and spent the months moving/ repatriating personnel and their families** AFMNZ

> ***"The dogfight had been something of a massacre, even though the 14 or so Zeros outnumbered the Seafires almost two to one and had the element of surprise"***

one of which he probably destroyed before suffering a jammed cannon.

Duncan's section leader was Sub Lieutenant Randy Kay who, in NN584, made a quarter attack on another Zero as it attacked his charges. This set a fire in the port wing root, and Kay switched to another enemy, blasting it with a high deflection shot as it crossed over. His first burst was accurate, blowing the tail off. Kay then turned toward a third Zero. Sub Lieutenant Ted Garvin – Hockley's wingman – flying PR263, also claimed a Zero, probably destroyed.

After the Avengers had bombed, the British returned to *Indefatigable* – though the damaged bomber had to ditch in the sea alongside a destroyer. Lowden was the last to land. He subsequently he received the DSC for his part in the action.

The dogfight had been something of a massacre, even though the 14 or so Zeros outnumbered the Seafires almost two to one and had the element of surprise, the Seafire pilots were credited with seven destroyed, three probables and four damaged – few, if any, enemy aircraft escaped unscathed. After landing, the Seafire pilots learned that operations were cancelled, and a ceasefire became effective shortly afterwards.

The Japanese instrument of surrender was signed a fortnight later, on September 2. Therefore, the Seafires had prosecuted the last British air combat of the war, which had ended in triumph – and with the war over, they hoped they could expect a freed Hockley to return.

Where was Fred?

Yet there was no sign of the young aviator, and, sadly, their victory was to be tinged with tragedy.

Freddie Hockley had landed near Higashimura (now Chōnan) and reputedly handed himself in to a local warden. He was taken prisoner by the 426th Infantry Regiment and after hearing the announcement from Emperor Hirohito that noon, which confirmed Japan's surrender, the unit's commanding officer, Rikugun-Taisa [colonel] Tamura Tei'ichi contacted his 147th Division's HQ and to be told by an intelligence officer, Rikugun-Shōsa [major] Hirano Nobou, to "finish" Hockley.

In a dreadful act of savagery, Rikugun-Tai-I [captain] Fujino Masazo, Sōchō [sergeant major] Hitomi Tadao and six men prepared a grave in the mountains and Hockley, bound and blindfolded, was shot twice, stabbed, and rolled into it. His remains were soon exhumed and cremated to cover up the killing. Some sources claim Tei'ichi was reluctant to order the act but also unwilling to disobey orders.

Hockley died nine hours after Japan's surrender had been announced. He was the last Royal Navy casualty of World War Two. His murder was discovered by US investigators and Masazo, Tei'ichi and Nobou were arrested and handed over to the British. Masazo confessed, and the trio were tried in Hong Kong in summer 1947. Masazo was sentenced to 15 years, while Tei'ichi and Nobou were hanged on September 16.

The chief prosecutor was D-Day and Burma veteran Major Murray Ormsby, who was haunted by the case. In 1995, the 50th anniversary of Hockley's death, Ormsby placed an *In Memoriam* notice in the *Daily Telegraph*, doing so each year until his death in 2013. BW

BOTTOM: **British and American warships in Tokyo Bay ahead of the formal signing of the Japanese Instrument of Surrender. Although not in shot, *Indefatigable* was present** US NAVY

An exterior view of The Dad's Army Museum Thetford, including the recently acquired telephone box ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF STUART WRIGHT UNLESS STATED

Thetford's Captain Mainwaring statue, seated between the Bell Inn and the former Anchor Hotel KEITH EVANS

DAD'S ARMY MUSEUM THETFORD

Don't panic! **Tom Baker** travels to the quiet town of Thetford, Norfolk, to visit a site dedicated to one of the nation's favourite TV sitcoms, *Dad's Army*

"Who do you think you are kidding, Mr Hitler?" With its unforgettable theme tune and the image of bumbling Home Guard volunteers struggling to march in step, David Croft and Jim Perry's *Dad's Army* first marched onto British television screens in 1968. Spanning nine series, eighty episodes and a feature film (not to mention a 2016 movie revival), the sitcom quickly won the hearts of the nation as the long-suffering Captain George Mainwaring (Arthur Lowe) led his motley platoon on various comic misadventures in and around the fictional seaside town of Walmington-on-Sea.

Today, *Dad's Army* remains one of the country's most beloved TV comedies and the legacy of the show is thriving in the sleepy market town of Thetford, Norfolk. Chosen as the primary filming location for many exterior scenes, Thetford doubled as Walmington-on-Sea, its period charm and architecture providing the perfect backdrop for the platoon's many escapades. It's only fitting, then, that the *Dad's Army* Museum should be based there, too. Located within the Old Fire Station at the rear of the Thetford Guildhall, the entirely volunteer-run museum blends the television history of *Dad's Army* with the real-life wartime legacy of the area.

In 2004, an EU grant was used to fund guided tours of key *Dad's Army* filming locations around Thetford, followed by bus tours skirting the edge of the nearby Stanford Practical Training Area, an active military practice site in which the BBC had secured permission to film. Organisers asked for a small display area within the Old Fire Station at Thetford Guildhall – once a set location for two episodes. With growing support from across the UK, the *Dad's Army* Museum officially opened its doors to the public in December 2007.

Far from being a static location, the *Dad's Army* Museum also spills out into Thetford and beyond. In 2007, an appeal was launched to fund a permanent sculpture in the town to commemorate the show. Following significant public interest, a life-sized bronze of Captain Mainwaring, seated on a bench between the Bell Inn and the former Anchor Hotel, was unveiled in 2010.

Speaking to *BAW*, museum curator Stuart Wright said: "In 2012, another opportunity to expand the scope of the museum beyond the Guildhall presented itself when the original Ford BB butcher's van used by Lance Corporal Jones (Clive Dunn) appeared at auction. With the help of two local families, £63,000 was raised and the iconic vehicle was secured." Now housed at the nearby Charles Burrell Museum, Jones's van is regularly taken out for public events with a platoon of lookalikes of the cast.

On arrival at the museum, visitors will notice a red telephone box positioned just outside the main entrance. Recently acquired, the telephone box serves as a nod to a memorable series three episode, *The Lion Has Phones*.

WALMINGTON-ON-SEA
DAD'S ARMY MUSEUM
Welcome
CORONA
The Eastern Morning Gazette
The entrance hall welcoming visitors to Walmington-on-Sea

The Church Hall area, complete with an exhibition devoted to Ian Lavender, who portrayed Private Pike and was the last surviving original cast member until his death in 2024

Visitors step directly into a re-creation of George Mainwaring's 'Swallow Bank', with a teller's window, period props and wartime signage evoking the fictional manager's civilian role.

"Guests then enter a replica of the Walmington-on-Sea church hall and stage," said Stuart. "This was often the backdrop to many of the platoon's escapades in the show, including the infamous 'Don't tell him, Pike!' scene." At one end of the room stands the Vicar's office, where visitors are encouraged to pose for photographs.

Within the Church Hall are several original costumes and detailed replicas. "Among the most cherished artefacts here is Private Walker's original tunic, worn by the actor James Beck," commented Stuart. Nearby, another highlight is a replica of Lance Corporal Jones's pre-1914 scarlet dress uniform complete with two rows of medals, first worn by actor Clive Dunn in the episode *The Bullet is Not for Firing*. Jones's medals and uniform reflect a surprising level of historical accuracy – a testament to the care that the show's creators, former servicemen Jimmy Perry and David Croft, took in replicating authentic military detail. In the script, Jones mentions that he served with the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, while a careful look at his medals shows he was a veteran of the Gordon Relief Expedition, the Sudan campaign, the Second Boer War, the North West Frontier and World War One.

Visitors move on to an exhibition devoted to Ian Lavender, who portrayed Private Pike and was the last surviving original cast member until his death in 2024. His replica scarf is on display with accompanying information boards, along with photographs of his 2008 visit to the museum for the series' 40th anniversary.

You next enter the adjoining Bunker Room. Stuart explained: "This area loosely tells the story of stand-out episodes and includes an assortment of props, artefacts and information boards discussing the backgrounds of the actors." Aside from a well-preserved wishing well prop from in Private Godfrey's garden in the episode *Is There Honey Still for Tea?*, panels and artefacts highlight actor Arnold Ridley's service in World War One as a Lance Corporal with the Somerset Light Infantry during the Battle of the Somme, before being severely wounded during a close-quarter engagement.

The gallery continues with a poignant tribute to Colin Bean, who played Private Sponge, where visitors can look through his personal scrapbooks. "Visitors can also enjoy an audio-visual installation featuring interviews with local Thetford extras

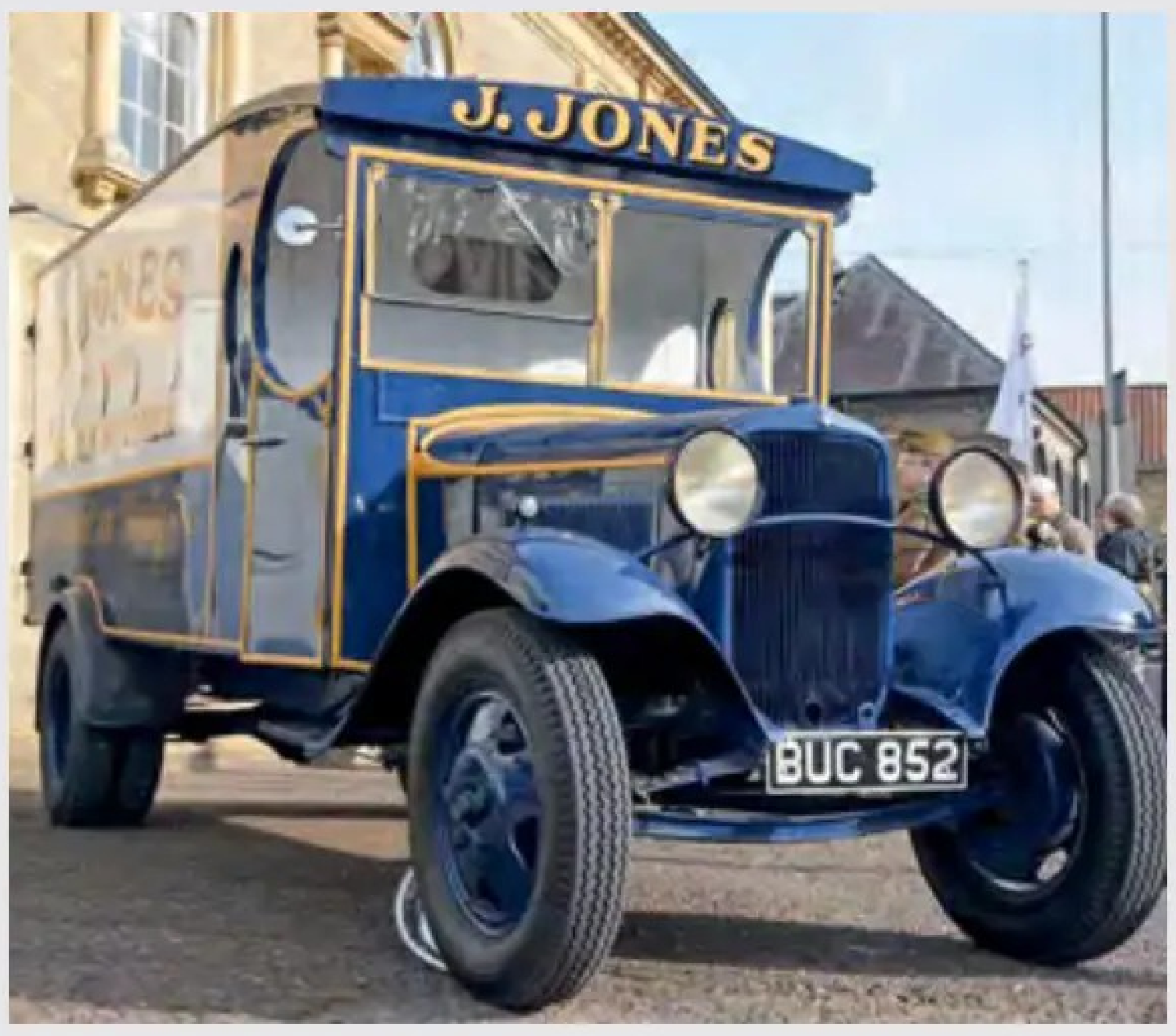
A replica of the dress uniform worn by Lance Corporal Jones, played by Clive Dunn

The museum's very own Captain Mainwaring, Mick Whitman, poses for a photograph in his office

The Bunker Room loosely tells the story of stand-out episodes and includes an assortment of props, artefacts and information boards discussing the background of actors

Museum director's favourite:

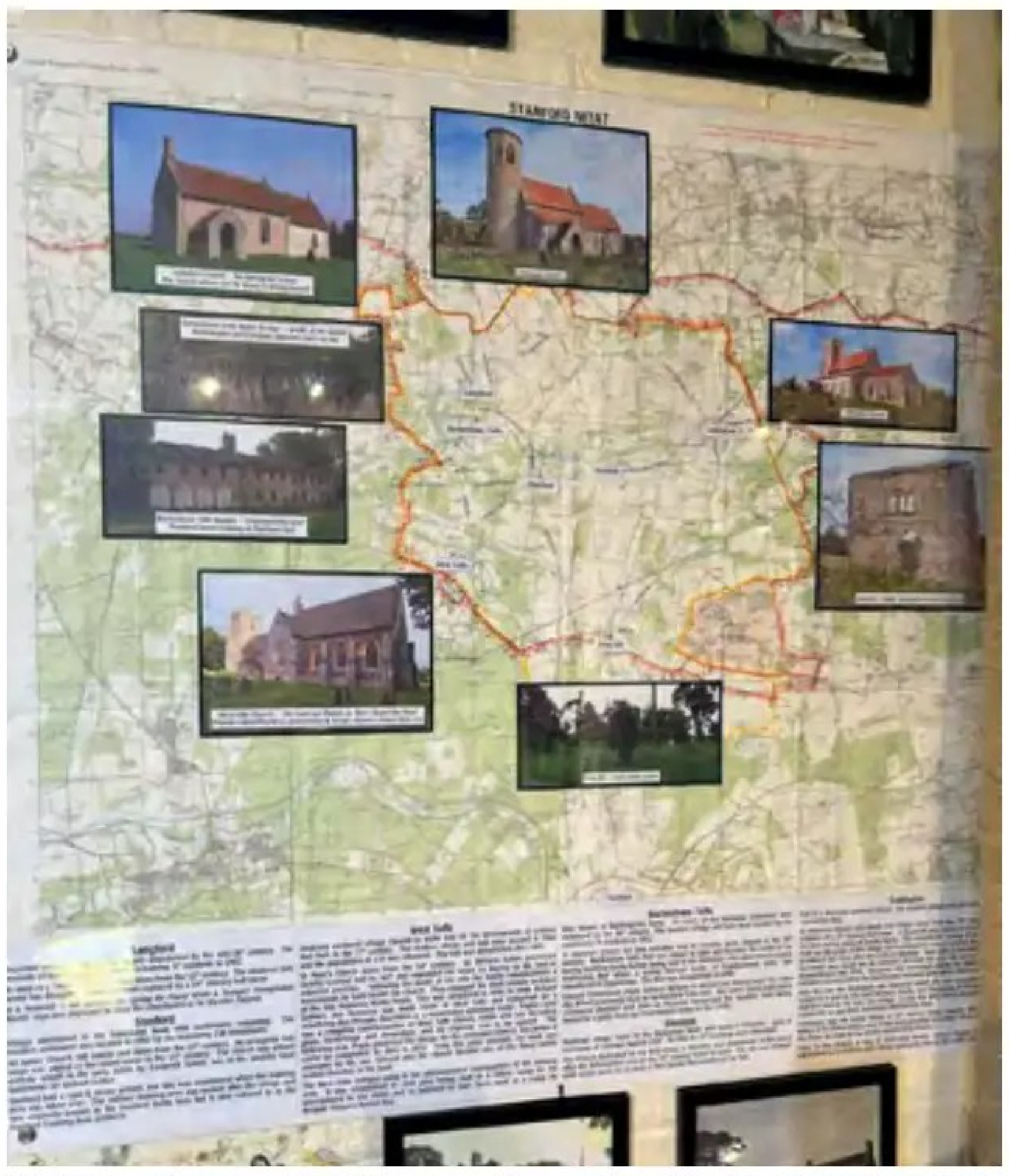
"My favourite artefact within the museum collection is Lance Corporal Jones's original 1935 Ford BB van, once used in the series and now fully restored and kept at the nearby Charles Burrell Museum. It is essentially our shop window when we take it out to events, and people always toot their horns as we drive by. There's so many memorable moments in the show featuring this very van."



The original Ford BB Van driven by Lance Corporal Jones, acquired by the museum in 2012

A recreation of a scene from the episode *Something Nasty in the Vault*

A well-preserved wishing well prop used in the episode *Is There Honey Still for Tea?*, alongside panels and artefacts highlighting actor Arnold Ridley's wartime service



Multiple displays, like this one discussing the Stanford Training Area, highlight the wartime history of the local area

The Marigold Tea Room

who participated in the show's filming," commented Stuart.

The Home Guard room explores the wartime history of Thetford and the local area. "One display contrasts the show's fictional Home Guard with Thetford's actual detachment," said Stuart. "A commemorative plaque and displayed documents list those who served in the Thetford Home Guard in World War Two, as well as in the Home Defence Volunteer Training Corps in World War One."

A selection of maps highlight the remaining wartime defences in the area – including pillboxes plotted against local fallback lines – while information boards discuss the history of local RAF airfields such as RAF Honington, from where the first bombing raid of the war was flown by IX Squadron on September 4, 1939.

One stand-out exhibit is a recreation of a scene from the episode *Something Nasty in the Vault*, in which Mainwaring and Sergeant Wilson (John Le Mesurier) get trapped underneath an unexploded bomb.

The tour concludes in the Marigold Tea Room, a 1940s-style café serving wartime recipes, where the shop counter itself is a historical artefact. "It was once part of a local wine merchant's shop in Thetford, visited by none other than Joachim von Ribbentrop in the 1920s," said Stuart. The café is also home to a panoramic mural that combines key elements from the museum and town, including the Jones van, the Guildhall and the bronze Mainwaring statue.

The *Dad's Army* Museum in Thetford is more than a nostalgic collection of showbiz artefacts., it's a fine tribute to efforts of the Home Guard and the wartime resilience of the home front.

Visitor information

The Dad's Army Museum Thetford is open Saturdays, 10am to 3pm. Private tours and coach trips can be organised by prior arrangement and subject to availability.

Admission: Free
Address: Dad's Army Museum, The Old Fire Station, The Guildhall, Cage Lane, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2DS
What3words location: critic.digested.blogging
Closest station: Thetford Station (12 min walk)
Tel: 07470 165795
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IMAGE of WAR

A victorious thumping

HMNB Devonport, Plymouth, February 15, 1940

On December 13, 1939, the cruisers *Exeter, Ajax* and *Achillies* engaged the panzerschiff *Graf Spee* off the River Plate. Wargaming and number-crunching had predicted a British victory, but *Graf Spee* turned out to be more formidable than expected. The 83-minute action was the first major naval battle of World War Two, and while *Exeter's* 8in guns could theoretically defeat *Graf Spee's* armour at any reasonable range – and she fired faster and had more speed – the German warship focused fire on her. Withdrawing early, *Exeter* landed just two damaging hits, while her 'A' and 'B' turrets were knocked out, her fire control system disabled, the mainmast dislodged and she was flooding – plus 61 crewmen had been killed. She retired to the Falklands, replaced by *Cumberland* (which sailed 1,000nm in just 34 hours). Trapped in Montevideo in Uruguay, *Graf Spee* was scuttled on December 17. *Exeter* arrived home on February 14, 1940, with Winston Churchill being her first visitor. Here, a day later, two sailors point to the damage to her forward funnel.

HUDSON/TPA/GETTY

A HERO OF 'HELL'S MILE'

Although a troop leader during the Charge of the Light Brigade and one of the first recipients of the VC, **Alexander Roberts Dunn** is largely forgotten in Canadian history – in spite of his suspicious death.

Words: **Alex Zakrzewski**

Friedrich Kaiser's dramatic oil-on-canvas interpretation of the legendary assault down the 'Valley of Death' during which Dunn earned the VC; *Charge of the Light Brigade, 25th October 1854* HERITAGE IMAGES/TOPFOTO

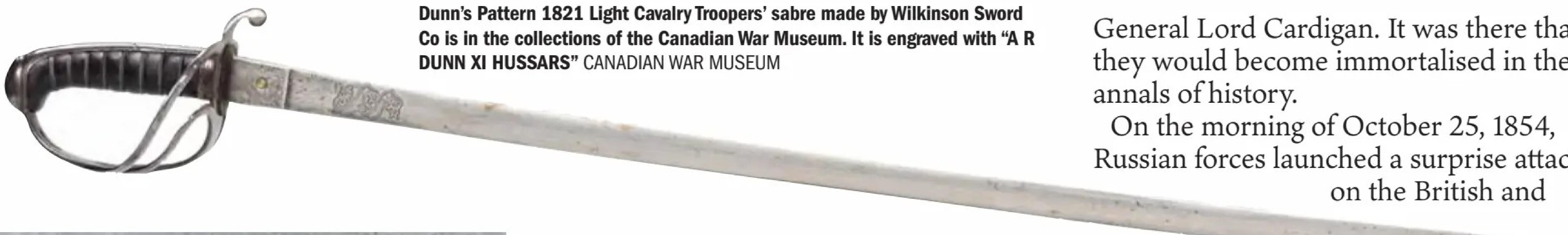
Shortly after World War Two, a British officer patrolling the outskirts of Senafe, in what was then Italian Abyssinia (now Eritrea), came across an overgrown cemetery. He noticed that one grave had been surprisingly well-maintained by the former Italian occupiers. On closer inspection, he was surprised to discover that it belonged to a British officer who had died many decades earlier. Unbeknown to him, he had stumbled upon the final resting place of a hero of the Charge of the Light Brigade – and Canada's first Victoria Cross recipient.

Alexander Roberts Dunn was born in York (now Toronto), Upper Canada, on September 15, 1833. He was the fifth son of John Dunn, the Receiver General for Upper Canada, a prominent position. In addition to his government duties, John also served as a director of the Bank of Upper Canada and managed several other companies in the developing colony. Upper Canada grew rapidly during the 1830s, and the Dunn family prospered, acquiring wealth and standing. The young Alexander attended what is now the prestigious Upper Canada College.

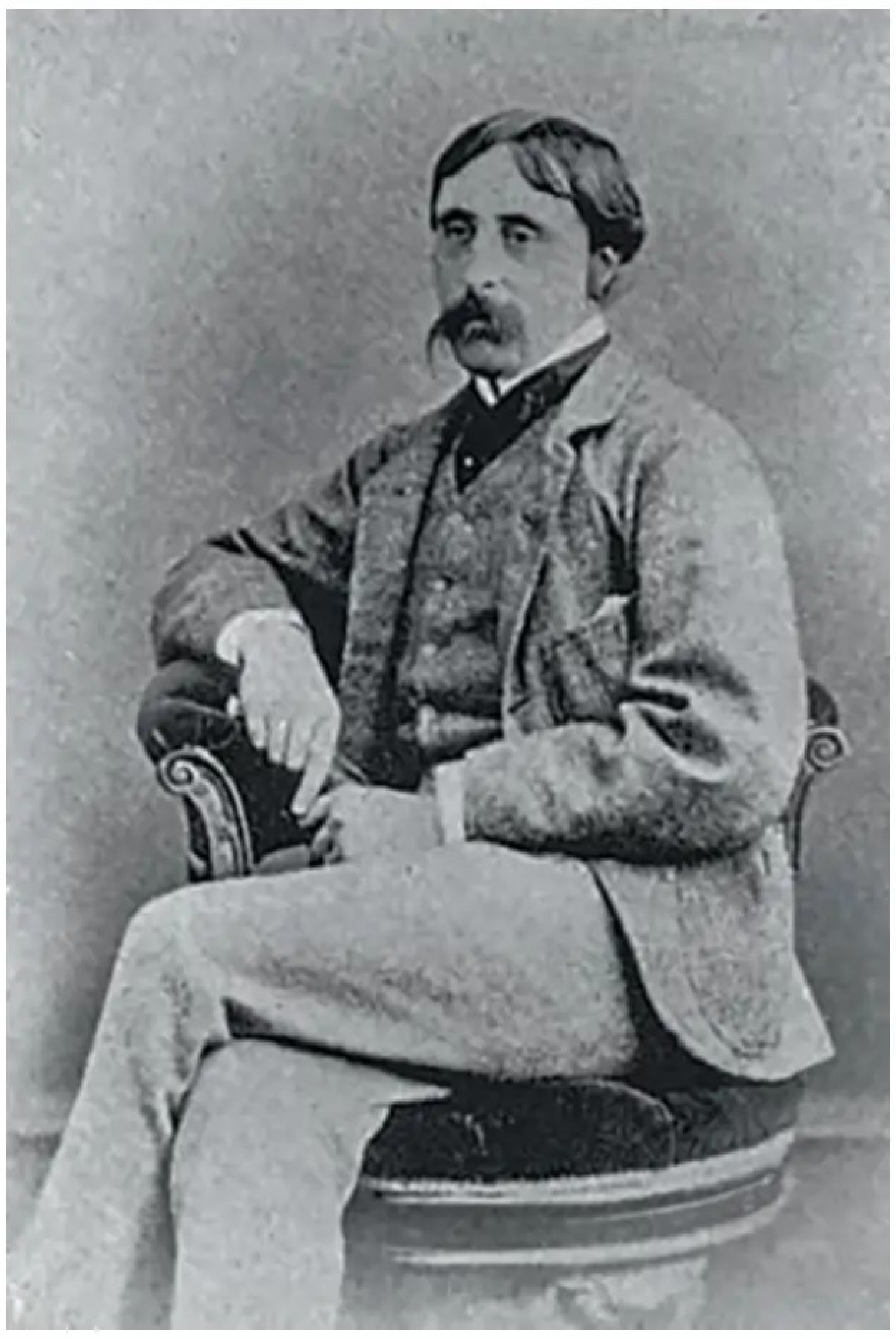
In 1845, the family relocated to London, where Dunn continued his education at Harrow School. In 1852, aged 19, he purchased a cornetcy in the 11th Hussars (Prince Albert's Own), advancing to lieutenant the following year.

The 11th Hussars were a storied regiment, nicknamed the 'Cherry Pickers' after an ambush in a cherry orchard during the Peninsular War. It embraced this moniker, proudly wearing distinctive red trousers as part of their ornate uniform. Their commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Lord Brudenell, the Earl of Cardigan – a notoriously difficult personality dogged by scandal – was a ferocious disciplinarian. Obsessed with the reputation and prestige of his regiment, he spent lavishly on their appearance while dolling out court martials and lashings for the slightest offence.

But while the rank and file suffered, the regiment's officers earned a reputation



Dunn's Pattern 1821 Light Cavalry Troopers' sabre made by Wilkinson Sword Co is in the collections of the Canadian War Museum. It is engraved with "A R DUNN XI HUSSARS" CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM



A photograph of Alexander Dunn, circa 1854 UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER

for glitter and dash – Dunn among them. He was exactly the type of man Cardigan favoured. By the age of 20, he stood at 6ft 3in, with long hair and a drooping walrus moustache. He cut an impressive figure in the saddle, being both a skilled horseman and an exemplary officer, respected by the men under his command. A custom sabre had to be made to accommodate his height, adding to his glamour.

Much like many other officers in the regiment – including Cardigan – Dunn also developed a reputation as both a womaniser and a gambler. This cast a long shadow over his career and fuelled speculation about his eventual fate.

Boldness in blunder

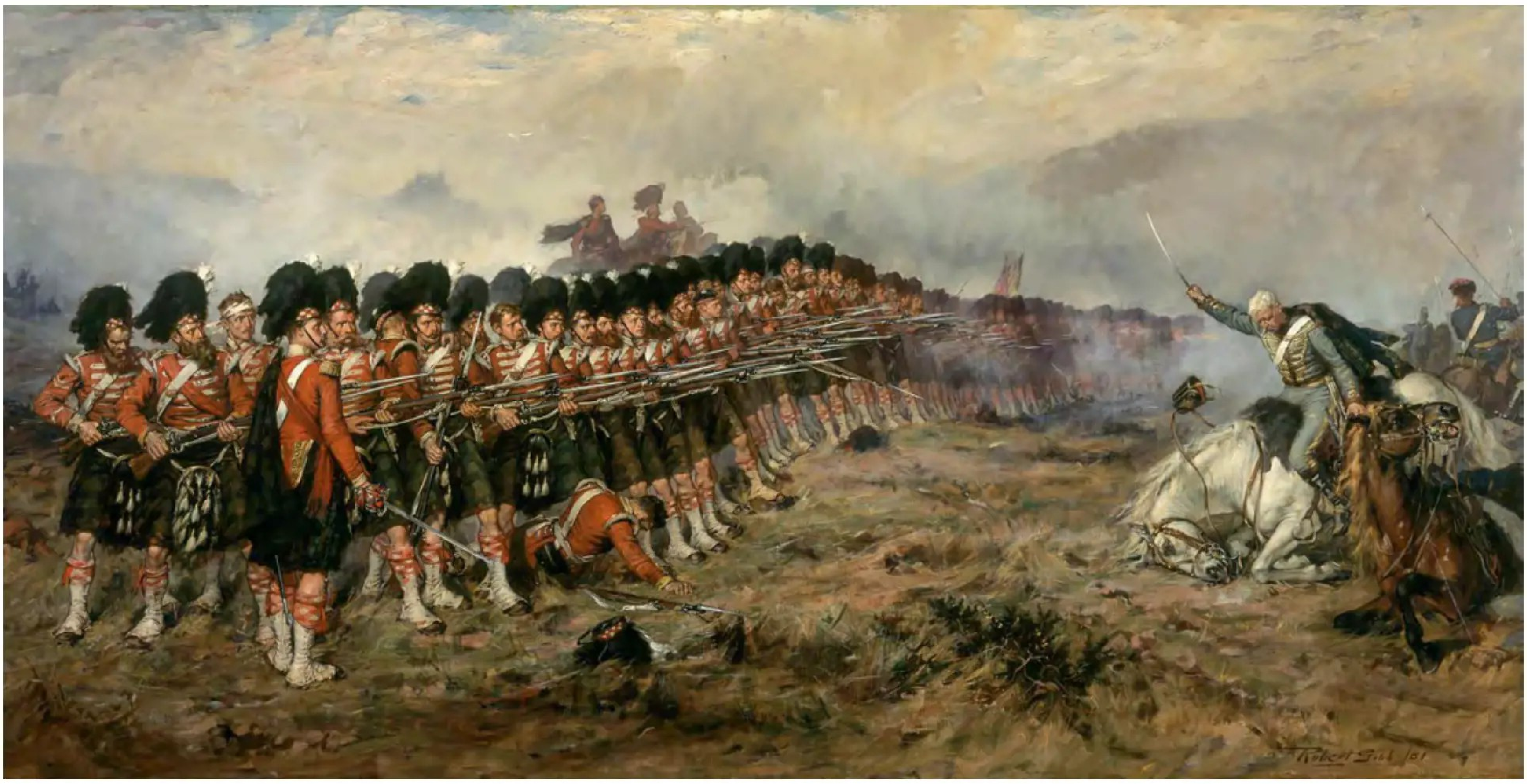
In 1853, long-simmering tensions between Britain, France and the Russian Empire erupted into a full-scale war. The crux of the conflict was the Ottoman Empire – dubbed the 'Sick Man of Europe' because of the long series of politico-economic problems that had eroded its once great power. As the Ottoman Empire declined, Eurasian interest in its territories grew, upsetting the delicate balance of power that had existed since the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

In 1853, Russia attacked the Ottomans, prompting Britain and France to come to the aid of the Turks. The 11th Hussars were among the forces sent first to the Balkans and then to Crimea, where the objective was to capture the key Russian naval base at Sevastopol.

The Hussars were deployed as part of the British Army's Light Brigade, a cavalry force under the recently promoted Major-General Lord Cardigan. It was there that they would become immortalised in the annals of history.

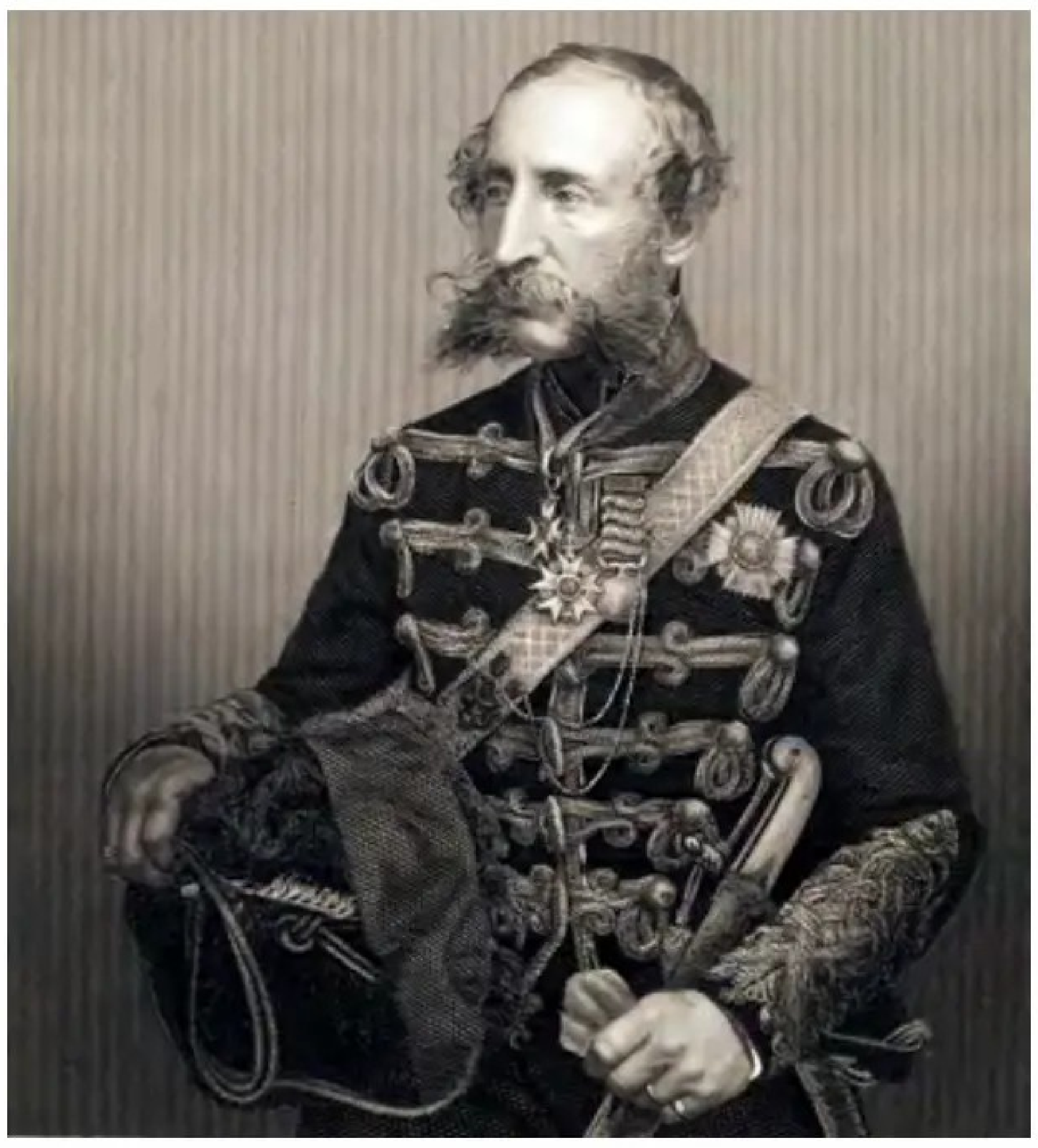
On the morning of October 25, 1854, Russian forces launched a surprise attack on the British and French at the port town of Balaclava. After overrunning the redoubts approaching the town, the Russians were stopped dead in their tracks, first by the brave stand of the 93rd Highland Regiment – the "Thin Red Line"– and then by a bold charge by the Heavy Brigade. The 800 horsemen of the Heavy Brigade were hugely outnumbered by the Russian cavalry, estimated at some 3,000-strong, but nevertheless charged them, recognising that the foe had halted and were vulnerable. Despite charging uphill at little more than a trot, it was the Russians that were sent retreating within ten minutes.

From his hilltop command post, British Commander-in-Chief Lord Raglan had a panoramic view of the battlefield. He could see the Russians carrying away the guns from captured redoubts. Just 90 minutes after the stand of the Highlanders, and 75 minutes after the Heavy Brigade's charge, he sent word to Lord Lucan, commander of the Cavalry Division, that the Light Brigade was to retrieve those guns. The order, verbatim, read: "Lord Raglan wishes the cavalry to advance rapidly to the front, and try to prevent the enemy carrying away the guns. Troop of horse-artillery may accompany. French cavalry is on your left. Immediate."



Robert Gibb's 1881 oil *The Thin Red Line*, a romanticised depiction of the 93rd Highlanders' standing against Russian cavalry at Balaclava. In reality, the Scots were supported by the Royal Marines and the horsemen failed to close within 100 yards. Nevertheless, the incident became a celebration of British martial stoicism and steadfastness NATIONAL WAR MUSEUM OF SCOTLAND

Taken by one of the first war photographers, Roger Fenton, this photograph shows the Allied cavalry encampment near Balaclava US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Major-General James Brudenell, Earl of Cardigan (shown as a lieutenant-general circa 1861) was the commander of the Light Brigade and led the charge TOPFOTO

The problem was that from Lucan's vantage point at the mouth of a narrow valley, he could not see the redoubts. When he pressed the messenger – Captain Louis Nolan, another native of York, Upper Canada – for clarification, an exasperated Nolan pointed down the valley at a waiting battery of Russian guns supported by both cavalry and infantry: "There, my lord, is your enemy; there are your guns."

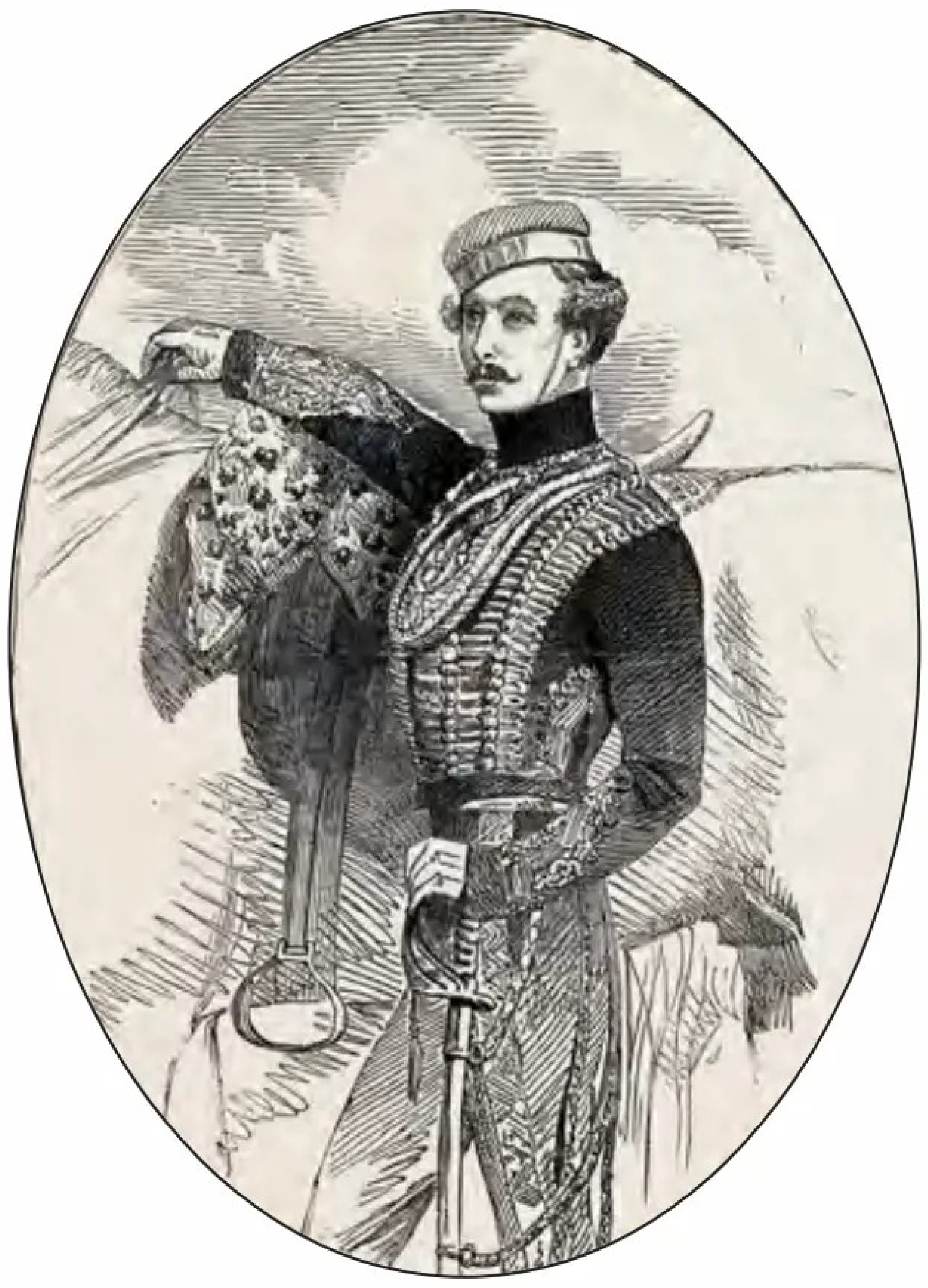
Why Nolan gestured in such a misleading way will never be known as Lucan did not question him further. Lucan duly ordered Cardigan – his brother-in-law, whom he detested – to charge the Russian guns head-on. Cardigan, though shocked by the suicidal order, also did as ordered without thinking to ask for clarification. And so, the Light Brigade set off "into the jaws of Death".

Rode the six hundred

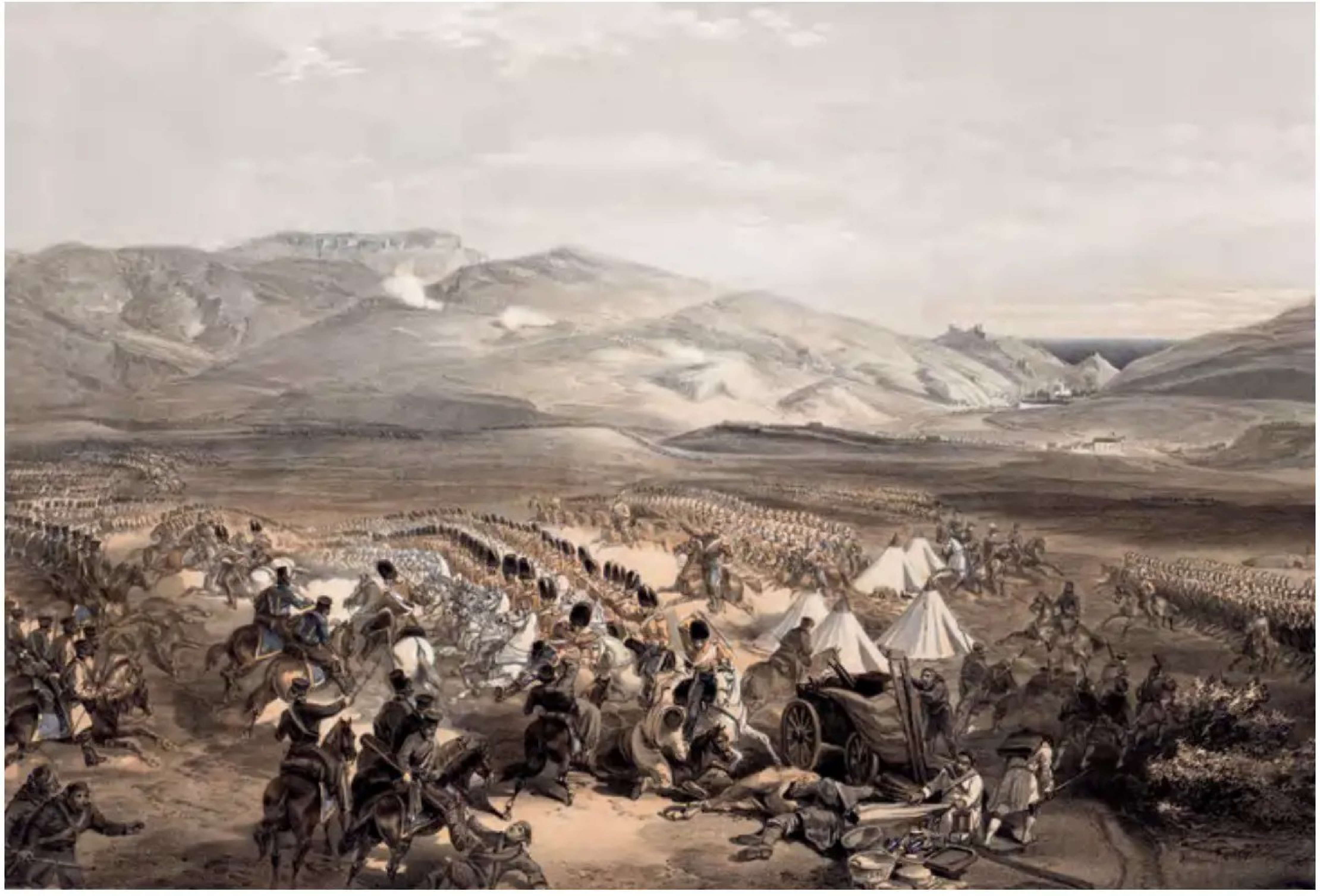
Much to Cardigan's fury, Lucan placed the 11th Hussars in the second line of the formation, with Dunn commanding 'F' Troop on the extreme left. As the 673 horsemen charged the almost mile-and-a-half – the 'Hell's Mile' – towards the Russian guns, they were battered by cannon shot and shell and showered by small-arms fire from infantry on the surrounding slopes. Nolan, a veteran of both British and Austrian armies, a respected tactician and recognised authority on military equestrianism, would be the first to die. He raced to the front of the charge – perhaps realising the error and attempting to turn the brigade – but was struck in the chest by a splinter.

In concert, the French Chasseurs d'Afrique charged the Russian flank on Fedioukine Heights – the battery that claimed Nolan – reducing the volume of fire directed at the Lights in the valley below. Lucan also led the Heavy Brigade to support the Lights in the valley, but before that brigade sprung its second charge in as many hours, the general halted them, fearing they too would be cut down. He instead waited, ready to support

> *"Dunn wheeled around and charged the assailing Russians, cleaving one almost in half, from shoulder to saddle, with his extra-long sabre. He emptied his revolver into the other attackers and cut down several more"*

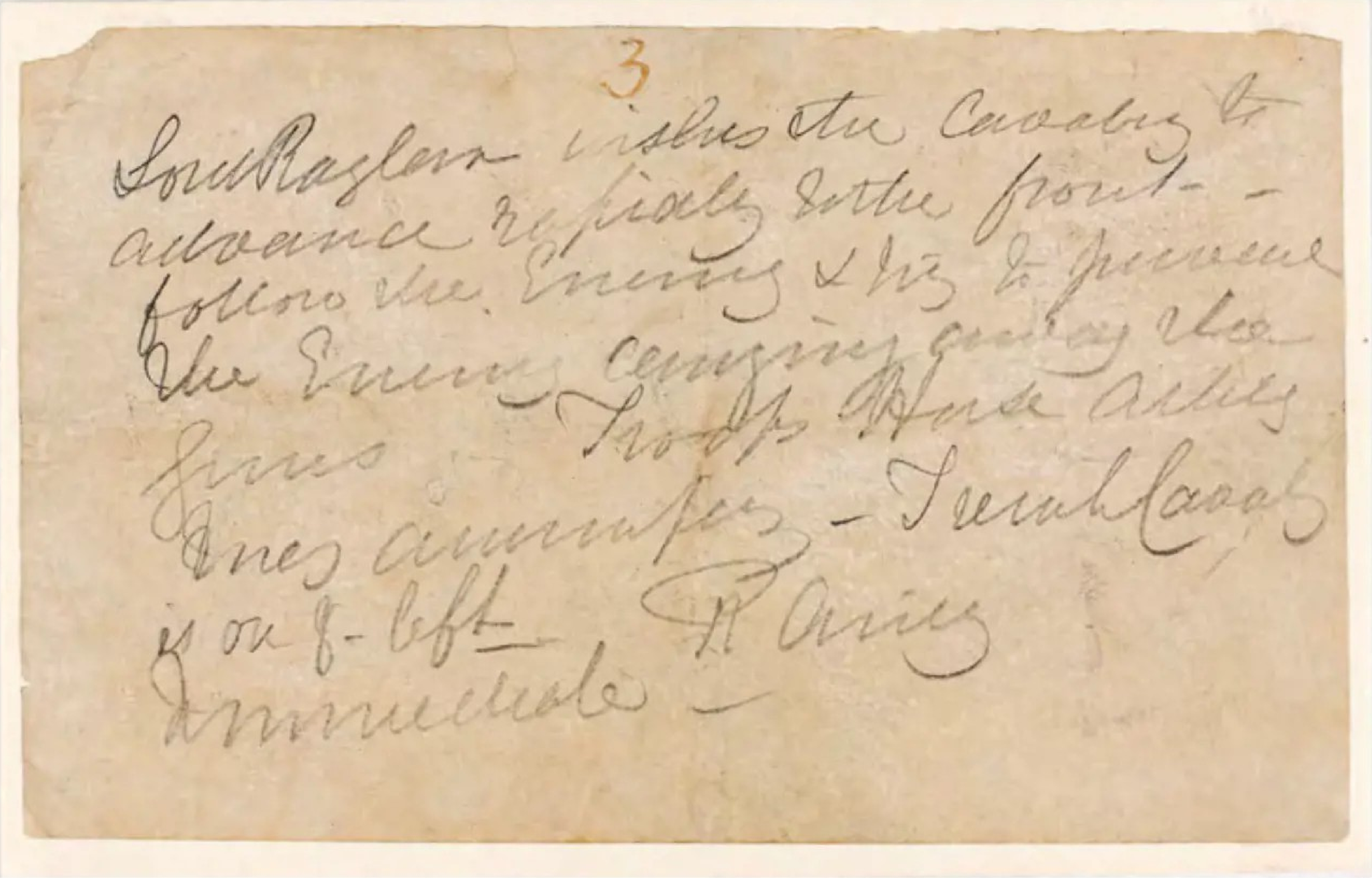


Captain Lewis Nolan, a Canadian who brought Raglan's orders to Lucan ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS (NOVEMBER 25, 1854)



About 90 minutes before the Light Brigade was committed, the Heavy Brigade sent seven squadrons to attack Russian cavalry ahead of the Allied cavalry encampment WILLIAM SIMPSON/US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The British C-in-C during the Crimean War, Field Marshal FitzRoy Somerset, 1st Baron Raglan, the Lord Raglan ROGER FENTON/METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART



3

Lord Raglan wishes the Cavalry to
advance rapidly to the front -
follow the Enemy & try to prevent
the Enemy carrying away the
Guns - Troop Horse Artilly
may accompany - French Cavalry
is on yr left
R Airey
Immediate -

The surviving hand-written order from Lord Raglan to charge, penned by Quartermaster-General (Sir) Richard Airey and delivered by Nolan to Lucan NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM

the Light Brigade as it retreated. The weight of the additional chargers may well have led to a more successful outcome – but may also have simply contributed to higher casualties.

Against all odds, the Light Brigade made it through the maelstrom and overran the Russian batteries at the foot of the valley, plunging into the supporting cavalry and infantry. The 11th managed to advance farther behind the Russian guns than any other regiment in the brigade. Finding themselves alone, they turned to charge the guns again and fight their way back to their lines. They were immediately attacked from all sides by Cossacks and Uhlans. When told they were surrounded, Lieutenant-Colonel John Douglas, the 11th's commander, loudly exclaimed: "Then fight for your lives!"

By this point, the 11th had been reduced to about 80 men from the roughly 140 who had set out on the charge. It was here that Dunn distinguished himself. Hacking through the Russian horsemen, he managed to open an escape route. But just as he was about to make for safety, he saw Sergeant Bentley from his troop attacked by three Russian lancers, his own horse badly wounded.

Dunn wheeled around and charged the assailing Russians, cleaving one almost in half, from shoulder to saddle, with his extra-long sabre. He emptied his revolver into the other attackers and cut down several more with the cold steel of his blade. He then dismounted, lifted Bentley onto his horse and, with a firm thwack on the rump, sent it galloping back toward British lines, saving the sergeant's life.

Dunn was not finished with the Russians yet. Despite now being in a perilous state of his own, he ran to the aid of another trooper, Private Harvey Levett, who was also on foot and being pursued by a lancer. Dunn ran up and skewered the Russian with a single powerful sabre thrust. Unfortunately, these heroics proved in vain, as Levett was killed shortly after.

> *"[Dunn was a] good-natured dandy, a bad commanding officer and not a good example to young officers – he was very popular but nearly destroyed the regiment"*
>
> AN ENSIGN OF THE 33RD FOOT

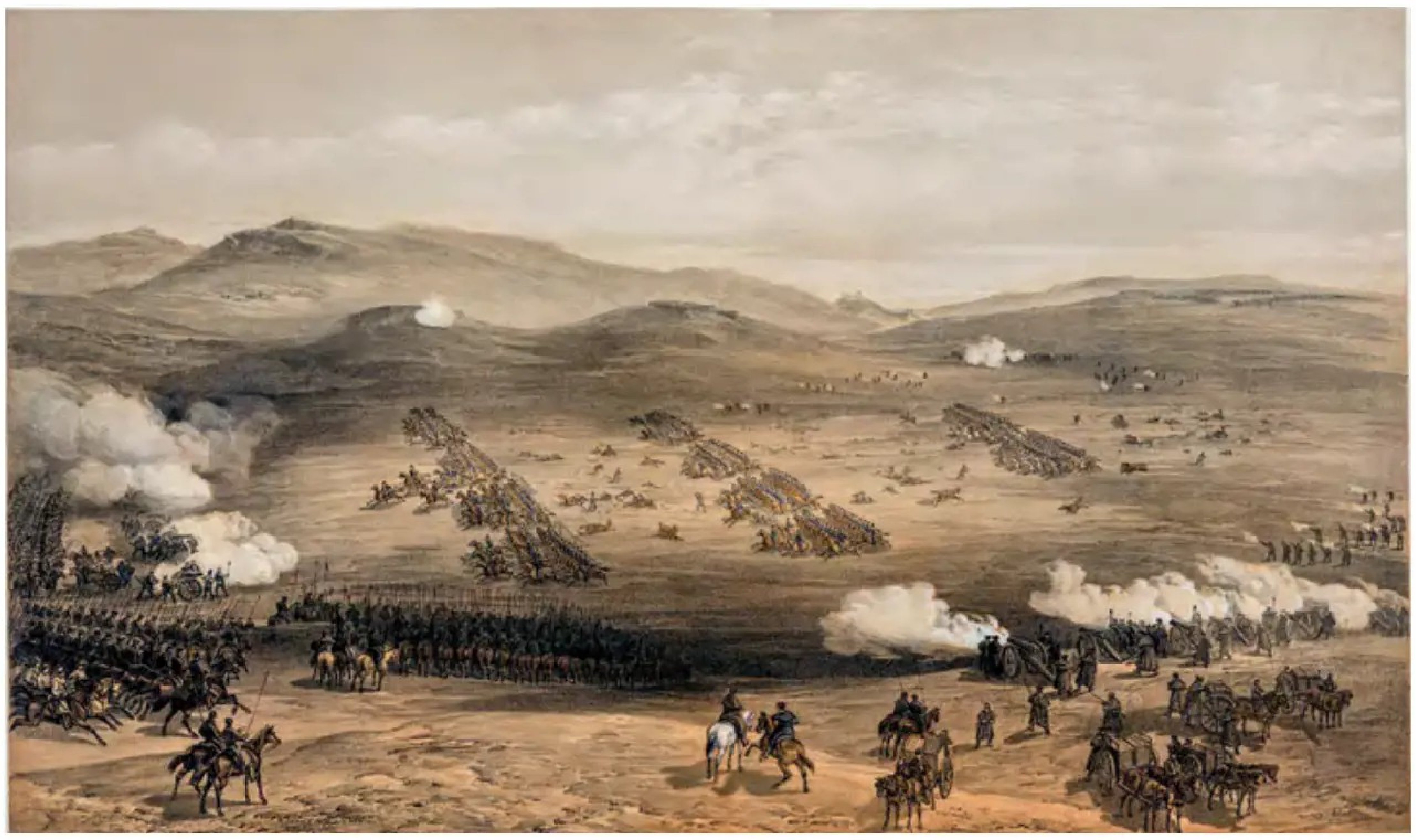
Gradually, the attack petered out. Some 50 minutes after the advance began, and 45 minutes after the Russian artillery began to bark, Dunn and the other survivors shambled their way out of the 'Valley of Death' along a grisly trail of suffering and slaughter.

Dead and dying men and horses lay everywhere, many mangled beyond recognition by cannon fire. When Dunn learned just how badly the Light Brigade had been mauled, he broke down and cried – just 25 men from his troop had survived the battle.

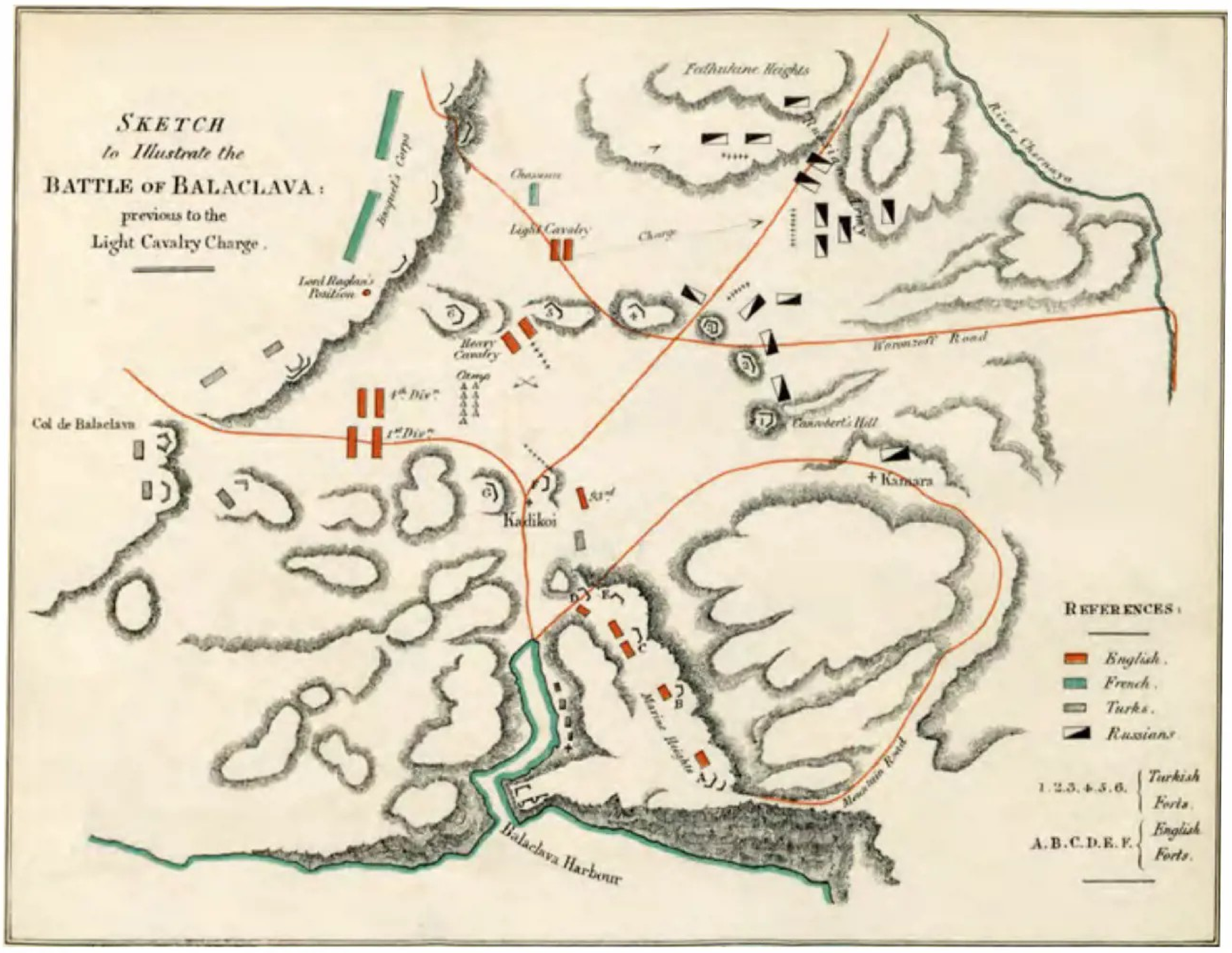
The blunder complete and history made, more than half the horses involved in the charge along Hell's Mile were killed or had to be euthanised. Of the 673 officers and men who charged down the valley, some 110 were dead or dying and another 200 or so wounded or taken prisoner.

Return to Canada

Following the Crimean War, on January 29, 1856, a new medal for gallantry was instituted by Royal Warrant: the

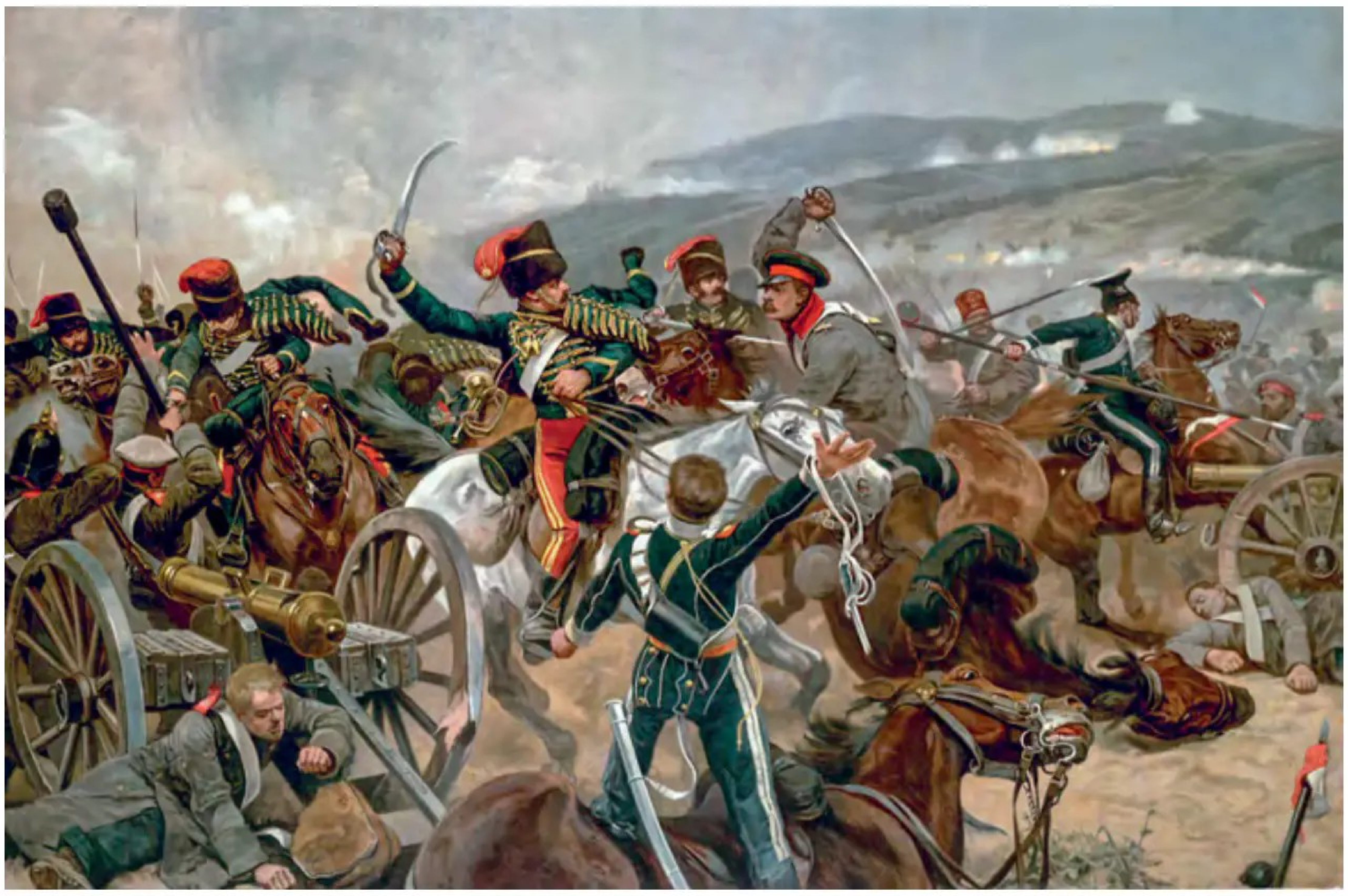


William Simpson's 1855 lithograph shows Earl Cardigan leading the three waves of the Light Brigade toward the Russian guns at the foot of the 'Valley of Death' US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS


SKETCH
to Illustrate the
BATTLE OF BALACLAVA:
previous to the
Light Cavalry Charge.
Fedhukine Heights
River Chernaya
Bosquet's Corps
Chasseurs
Light Cavalry
Charge
Lord Raglan's Position
Heavy Cavalry
Camp
4th Div.
1st Div.
Woronzoff Road
Causeway Hill
Kamara
Col de Balaclava
Kadikoi
93rd
Marine Heights
Mountain Road
Balaclava Harbour
REFERENCES:
🟥 English.
🟩 French.
▭ Turks.
◩ Russians.
1.2.3.4.5.6. Turkish Forts.
A.B.C.D.E.F. English Forts.

A sketch map of the Battle of Balaclava, showing the direction of the Light Brigade's charge THE BRITISH LIBRARY

Lieutenant Alexander Dunn in the uniform of the 11th Hussars UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER



This 1897 oil, The Relief of the Light Brigade, 25th October 1854, was commissioned to capture the moment of contact, when the British, depleted by Russian artillery, finally crossed swords with the gunners and horsemen. This is the most popular image of the charge, and was painted by Richard Caton Woodville – the most dramatic exponent of military art in the late-Victorian age
THE ILLUSTRATED SPORTING AND DRAMATIC NEWS/NAM

Victoria Cross. Made from Russian cannon bronze captured at Sebastopol, the award was open to all ranks. Of the 111 Crimean War recipients, six were awarded to participants in the Charge of the Light Brigade – including Lieutenant Dunn. He was the only recipient from the 11th Hussars, unanimously chosen for heroically rushing to the aid of his comrades when the fighting was fiercest.

Queen Victoria herself presented some of the first 62 awards at a special parade in Hyde Park in June of 1856. Dunn was not among them. By this point, his bad habits had caught up with him. He had sold his commission and returned to Canada with the wife of Colonel Douglas, his commanding officer. Revelation of the affair had caused considerable scandal. Not only was this an appalling betrayal of a brother officer, but the cuckolded Douglas refused to grant a divorce, leaving the couple in a permanent state of adultery.

Back in Canada, Dunn busied himself managing his family's considerable estate. Though the couple lived comfortably, sleepy, rural Canada was a far cry from the glitz and glamour of regimental life – not to mention the thrill and adventure of campaign. When the Indian Mutiny broke out in 1857, Dunn jumped at the chance to return to uniform. He was instrumental in raising the 100th (Prince of Wales's Royal Canadian) Regiment of Foot, becoming its first major in June 1858. Before departing for service overseas, Dunn was presented with a sword that supposedly belonged to British major-general and hero commander at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, James Wolfe.

The regiment did not see any fighting in India. Instead, it was posted to garrison duty, first in Gibraltar then in Malta. Despite the lack of action, Dunn's career continued to flourish. In 1861, he purchased a lieutenant-colonelcy for £10,000 (about £1,000,000 today). Two years later, he transferred to the 33rd (Duke of Wellington's) Regiment of Foot, a more storied and celebrated unit. In 1866, he was promoted to colonel – and he became youngest colonel in the British Army and the first Canadian to command a British regiment.

At first glance, Dunn's career appeared a phenomenal success, with further laurels and promotions surely to come. However, accounts of his conduct suggest that everything may not have been as rosy as it seemed. There were rumours that he had been forced out of the 100th due to excessive gambling. An ensign in the 33rd described him as a "good-natured dandy, a bad commanding officer and not a good example to young officers," adding that "he was very popular but nearly destroyed the regiment".

Peacetime duties did not suit Dunn. Given the scrutiny he was under, he was probably relieved when, in late 1867, the 33rd was sent to the Horn of Africa as part

Surviving cavalry troopers after the Charge of the Light Brigade ROGER FENTON/US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Cornet (Second Lieutenant) Henry Wilkin, Assistant Surgeon to the 11th Hussars. He was not required to charge with the brigade at Balaclava, but did so nonetheless ROGER FENTON/US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

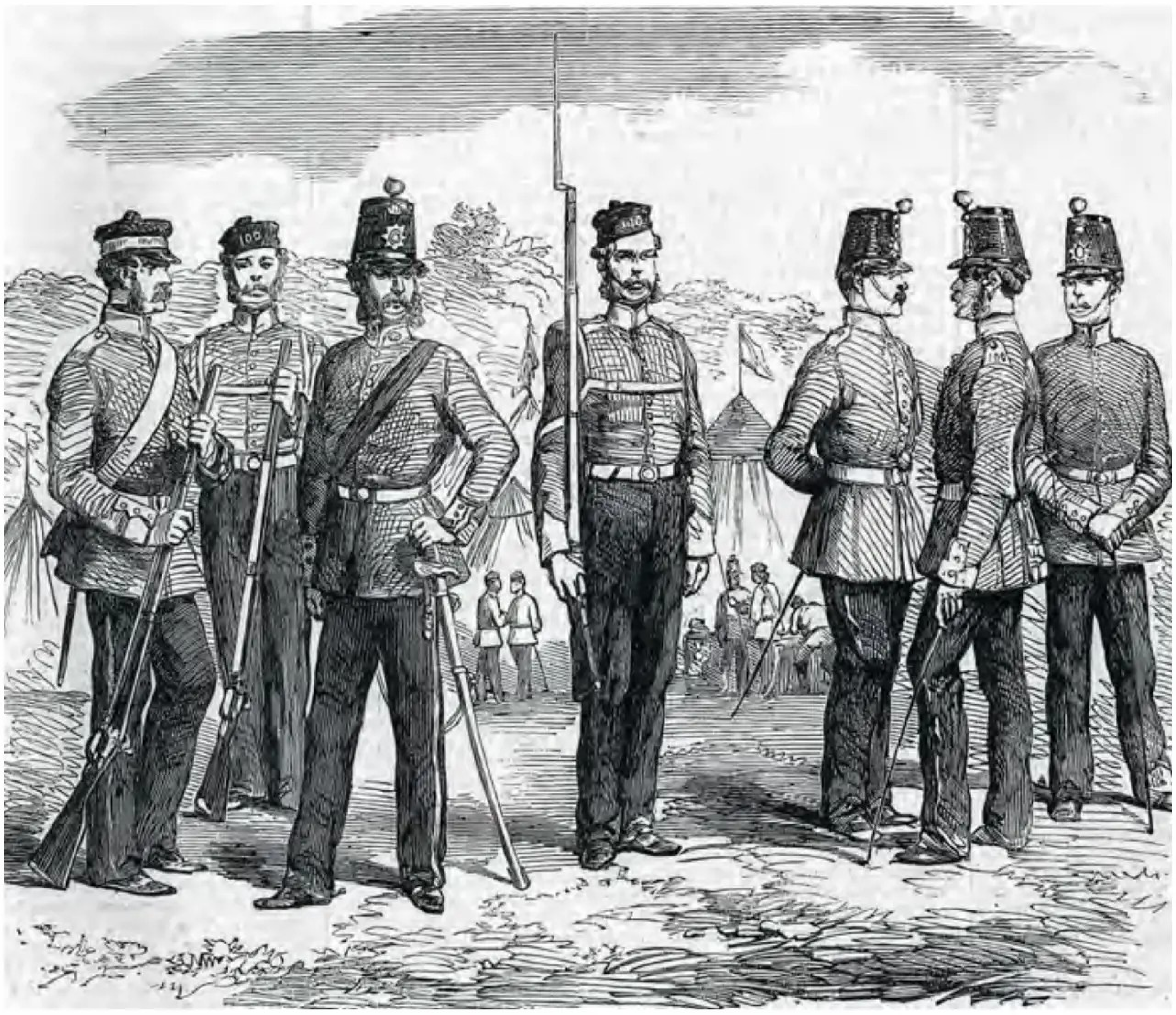
> *"These facts are, of course, circumstantial. Though suspicious and compelling, they do not offer any concrete evidence of murder or suicide. Dunn's death may very well have been a freak accident"*

of a punitive campaign against Abyssinian Emperor Tewodros II. He likely never imagined that this relatively low-risk colonial adventure would be his end.

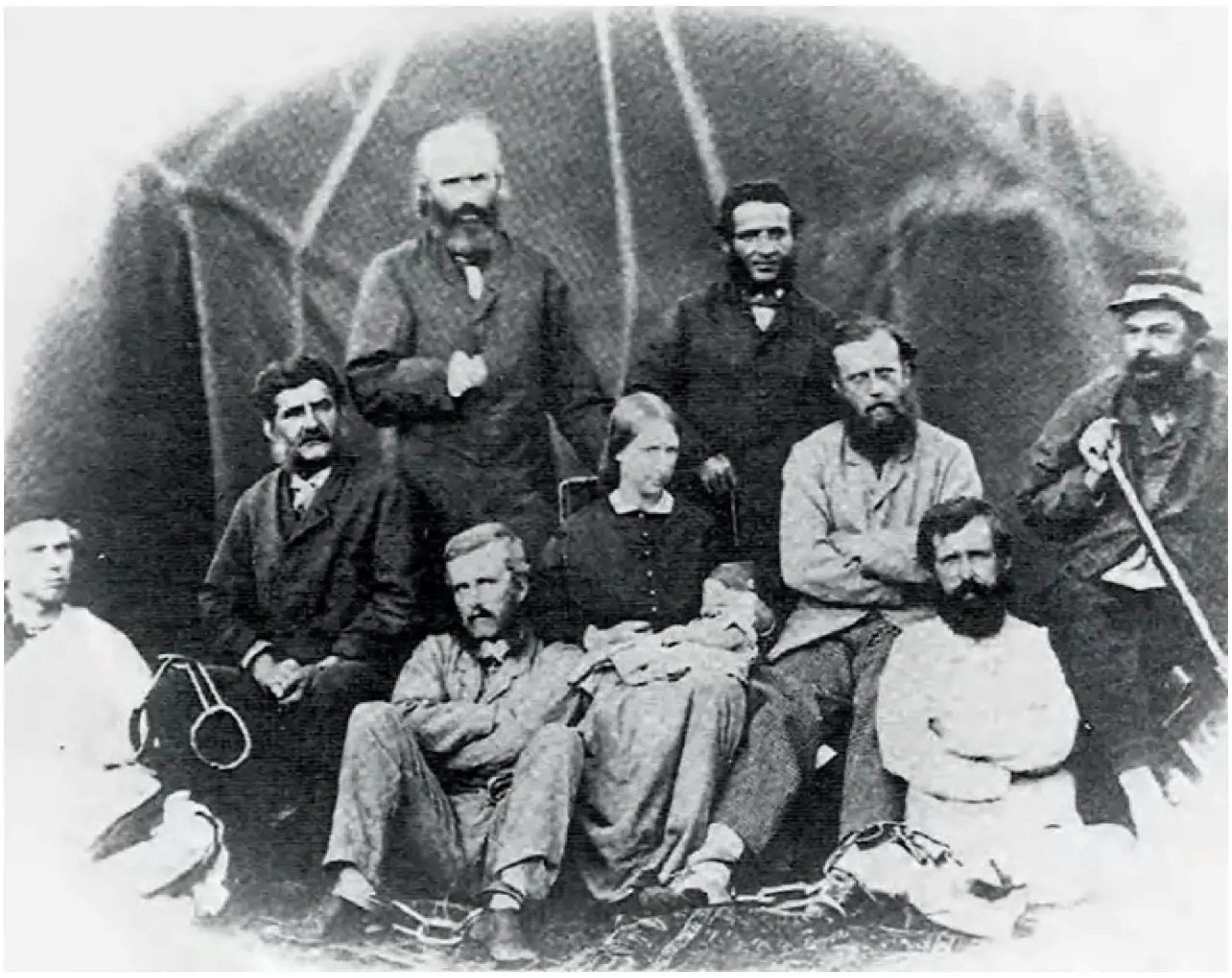
Where there is a will…

The Abyssinian Expedition is one of many successful, but forgotten colonial campaigns fought during the latter half of the 19th century. In a mad effort to force an alliance with Britain, Tewodros had imprisoned several Europeans, including British Consul Charles Cameron and a group of missionaries. The task of avenging this insult and freeing the prisoners fell on Sir Robert Napier and the Bombay Army, the nearest military force, which included the 33rd.

In January 1868, Napier and his massive force of 14,000 troops and 26,000 camp followers began the long march from their base at Zula on the Red Sea to Tewodros' citadel at Magdala, roughly 250 miles



Dunn VC was instrumental in the raising of the 100th (Prince of Wales Royal Canadian) Regiment, which supported imperial garrisons worldwide ANTIQUA PRINT GALLERY/ALAMY



European prisoners taken by Tewodros II in Magdala UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER

inland in the highlands. On January 25, the expedition reached Senafe, about 55 miles south of Zula. That evening, Dunn and James Sinclair, the regimental surgeon (later surgeon general), went shooting. Each was accompanied by an Indian hospital orderly.

What happened next remains a matter of conjecture.

At some point, the two separated, and Dunn stopped to rest, sending his orderly to fetch water from a nearby stream. From a distance, Sinclair heard a gunshot and then saw the orderly running towards him exclaiming: "Colonel Sahib is dead!" Sinclair ran to see for himself and found Dunn lying lifeless with a gunshot wound in his chest. According to some accounts, his final words were: "Run for a doctor". An investigation concluded Dunn had died from a tragic and unlikely accident. It was determined that his hunting rifle had slipped from his shoulder as he was wrestling with the cork on his brandy flask, discharging both barrels into his chest. Some accounts say he was trying to climb a hill or some other obstacle when the trigger got caught in his kit, causing the gun to go off.

Dunn was buried not far from where he was killed. With the campaign in full swing, the matter was hastily closed. The Abyssinian Expedition would prove a largely bloodless affair, with the official records noting just 48 fatalities, including two officers killed by gunshot wounds: one accidently and the other a suicide. Was Dunn's death the accident, or as some have speculated, the suicide? Or was it something more sinister?

Some accounts have Dunn looking sullen and downcast around the time of his death. Perhaps another scandal loomed for the well-known rogue, and he chose to take his own life to spare himself and his family another disgrace. His call for a doctor seems to contradict this theory. However, accounts differ as to whether he called for help – and the orderly who supposedly heard his final words and witnessed his death remains an unknown and somewhat mysterious figure in the story.

Also concerning is the drama surrounding Dunn's will. Dunn was a man of considerable wealth. Before leaving for Africa, he made a new will witnessed by a fellow officer and his personal valet. The valet, known only as Hastie, had been in Dunn's service for many years. A previous version of the will left £300 (about £30,000 today) to Hastie. As a witness to the new will, Hastie could no longer benefit. To compensate for this loss of inheritance, Dunn generously wrote him a cheque for £300.

After his death, Dunn's belongings were carefully examined, and it was found that his new will was missing. Also missing was a large collection of valuable rings. The former document came back into effect, and Hastie inherited £300 on top of the cheque Dunn had given him – a lucky windfall. Hastie's story does not end there. In the years following his master's death, he appealed to the Dunn family for help finding employment, and their influence helped him to secure a position with the Scottish Post Office. In 1870, he was convicted of embezzlement and imprisoned, raising further questions about his character and potential involvement in foul play.

The disappearance of the new will was also fortuitous for Dunn's "wife", who stood to inherit his entire estate under the provisions of the original will. Among the

British troops (of the Naval Brigade) before Goon-Goona Rock in Abyssinia OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

The man tasked with bringing Tewodros II to heel was Lieutenant-General Robert Napier, late Field Marshal Baron Napier of Magdala, who accomplished the feat while sustaining 48 dead – one of them Dunn VC JOHN WATKINS/NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

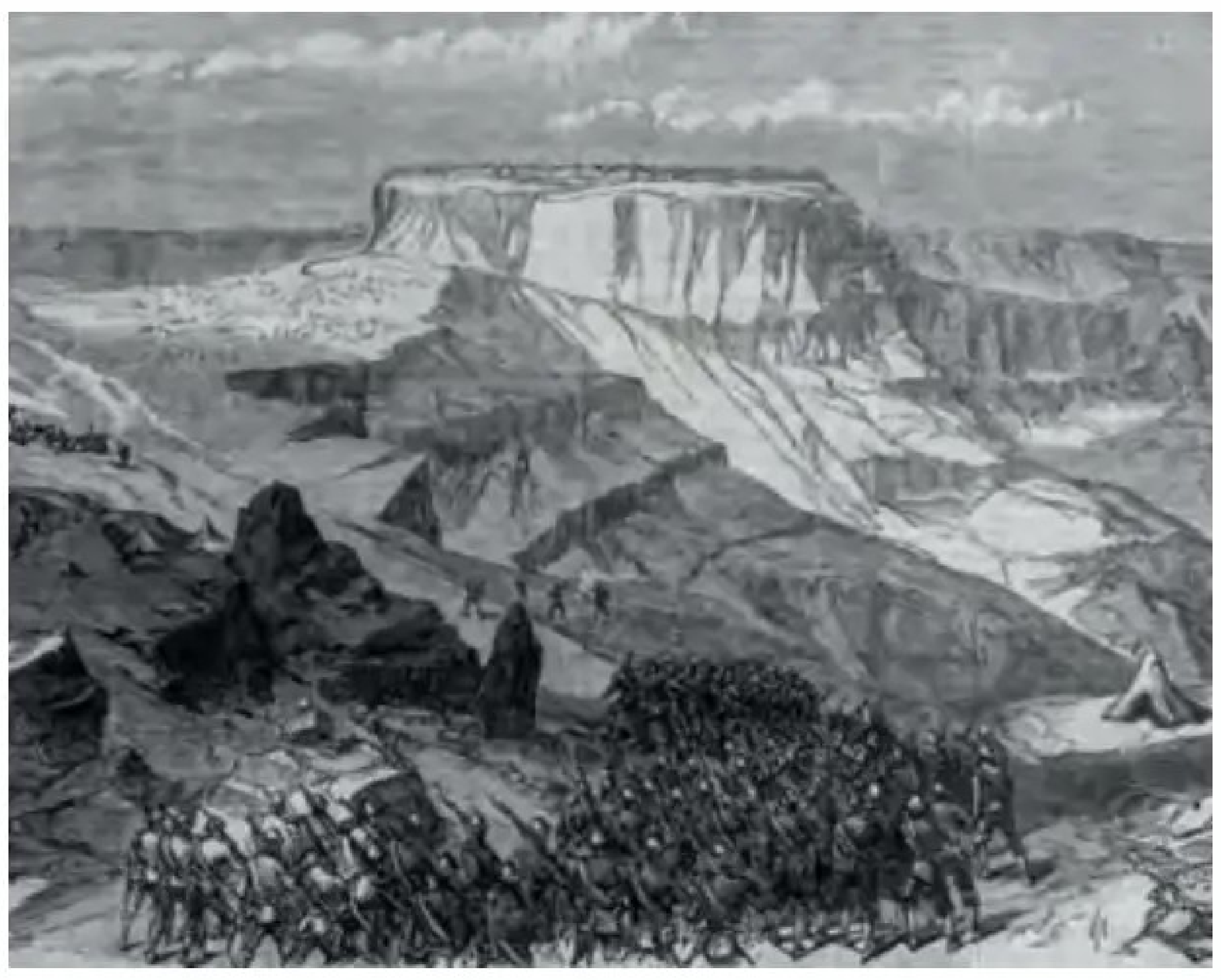
amendments made in the new document was a large bequeathment to an estranged sister with whom he had recently been reconciled. His wife apparently refused to acknowledge this change, and following his death, the Dunn family took her to court, which awarded his sister some money.

These facts are, of course, circumstantial. Though suspicious and compelling, they do not offer any concrete evidence of murder or suicide. Dunn's death may very well have been a freak accident involving a hair trigger and a sticky cork.

Lost legacy

In the decades after World War Two, Dunn's grave was again forgotten. In the early 2000s, it was rediscovered a second time, this time by Canadian peacekeepers operating in the region as part of a UN mission during the Ethiopian-Eritrean War. They were led to the grave – half expecting an ambush – by local children yelling "Canada". The perplexed peacekeepers sent a report home asking who "A R DUNN VC. COL" was. A week later, they got the shocking reply: he was a long-lost Canadian war hero.

Dunn's grave is still in Africa. There are no plans to repatriate his remains. Despite his accomplishments – not to mention his role in one of the most celebrated events in all military history – his name seldom appears in Canadian textbooks or mainstream historical narratives. Aside from a few minor memorials scattered across major cities (plaques, park names, etc) he remains largely forgotten in his mother country. It is a sad commentary on how Canada honours its heroes.



Men of the 33rd Regiment – Dunn VC's command until his mysterious death – advance on Magdala CHARLES ROBINSON/ ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS

Tim Cook, chief historian of the Canadian War Museum, offers some insight into Dunn's lost legacy. Speaking exclusively to *Britain at War*, he said: "Because Dunn was a Canadian before there was a Canada – and a Canadian who fought with the British in a 19th century campaign that is rarely taught in Canadian schools – it is not surprising that he is little known today."

"Sadly, it is the fate of most Canadians – those who have served their country with great courage and those who have contributed in their own way – to be forgotten after a few generations, save by their families. Perhaps we all need to work a little harder at better understanding our history."

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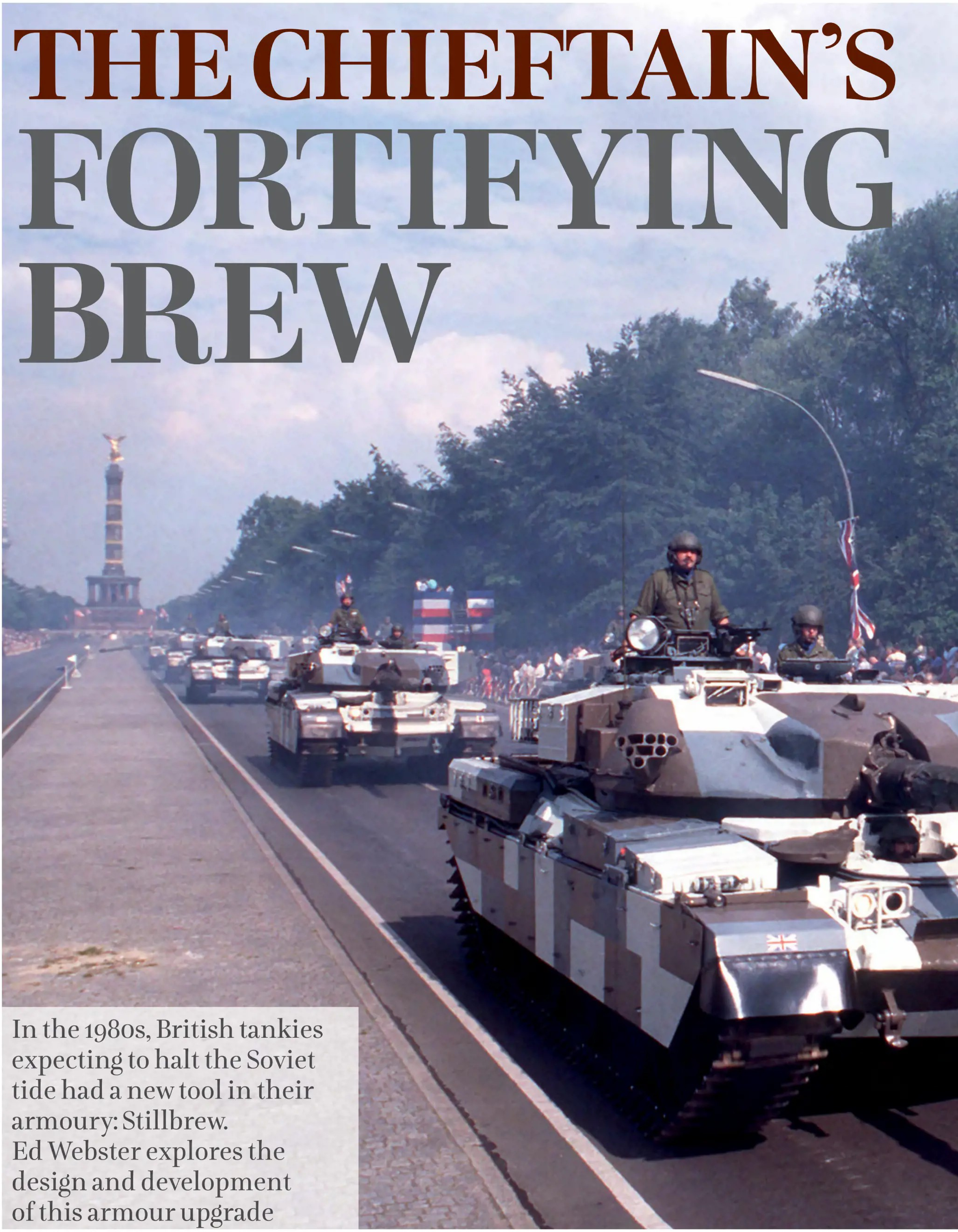
THE CHIEFTAIN'S FORTIFYING BREW

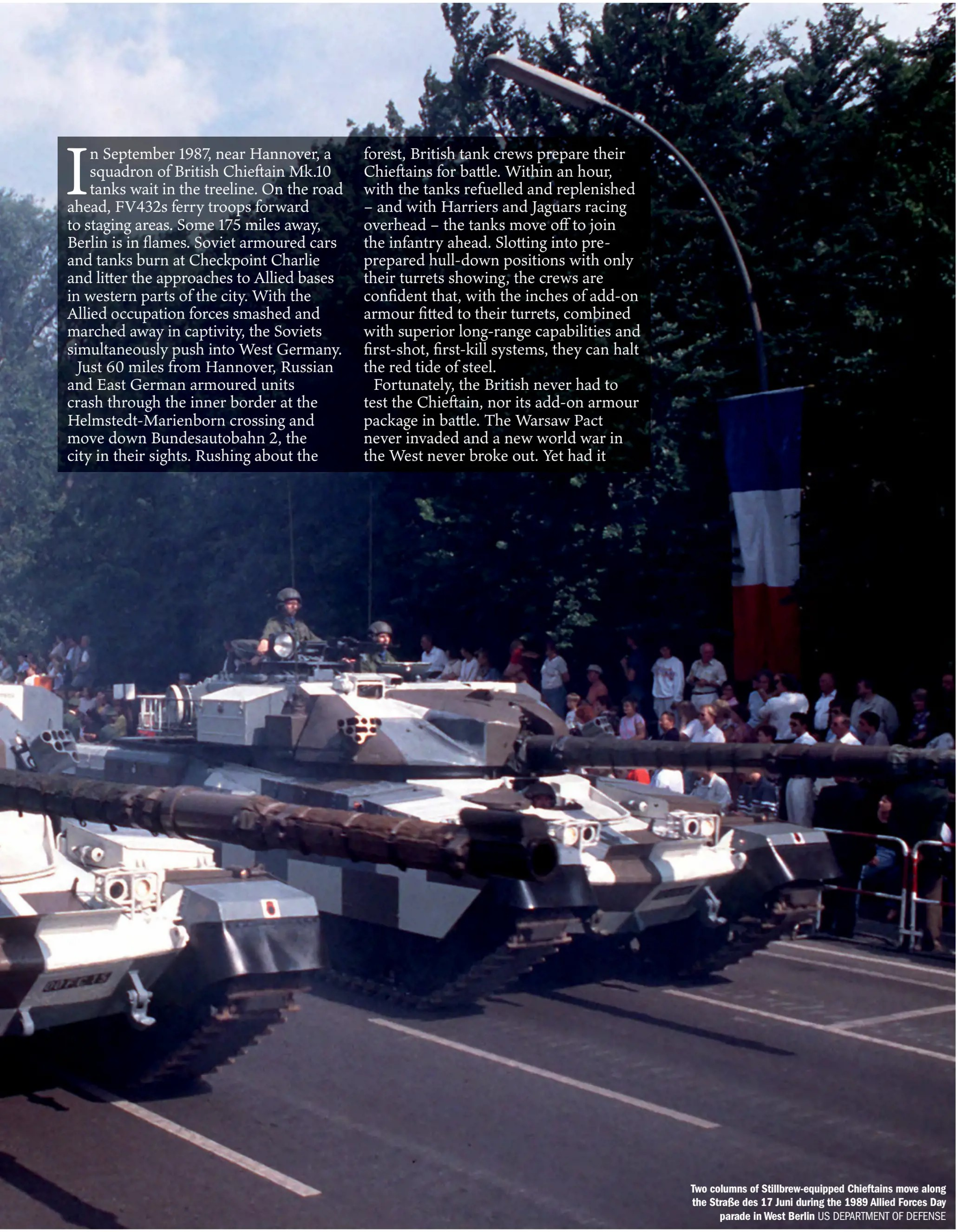


In the 1980s, British tankies expecting to halt the Soviet tide had a new tool in their armoury: Stillbrew.
Ed Webster explores the design and development of this armour upgrade

In September 1987, near Hannover, a squadron of British Chieftain Mk.10 tanks wait in the treeline. On the road ahead, FV432s ferry troops forward to staging areas. Some 175 miles away, Berlin is in flames. Soviet armoured cars and tanks burn at Checkpoint Charlie and litter the approaches to Allied bases in western parts of the city. With the Allied occupation forces smashed and marched away in captivity, the Soviets simultaneously push into West Germany.

Just 60 miles from Hannover, Russian and East German armoured units crash through the inner border at the Helmstedt-Marienborn crossing and move down Bundesautobahn 2, the city in their sights. Rushing about the forest, British tank crews prepare their Chieftains for battle. Within an hour, with the tanks refuelled and replenished – and with Harriers and Jaguars racing overhead – the tanks move off to join the infantry ahead. Slotting into pre-prepared hull-down positions with only their turrets showing, the crews are confident that, with the inches of add-on armour fitted to their turrets, combined with superior long-range capabilities and first-shot, first-kill systems, they can halt the red tide of steel.

Fortunately, the British never had to test the Chieftain, nor its add-on armour package in battle. The Warsaw Pact never invaded and a new world war in the West never broke out. Yet had it



Two columns of Stillbrew-equipped Chieftains move along the Straße des 17 Juni during the 1989 Allied Forces Day parade in West Berlin US DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE done so, could British tank crews have counted on their new composite armour blocks – known as Stillbrew – to improve their chances of survival?

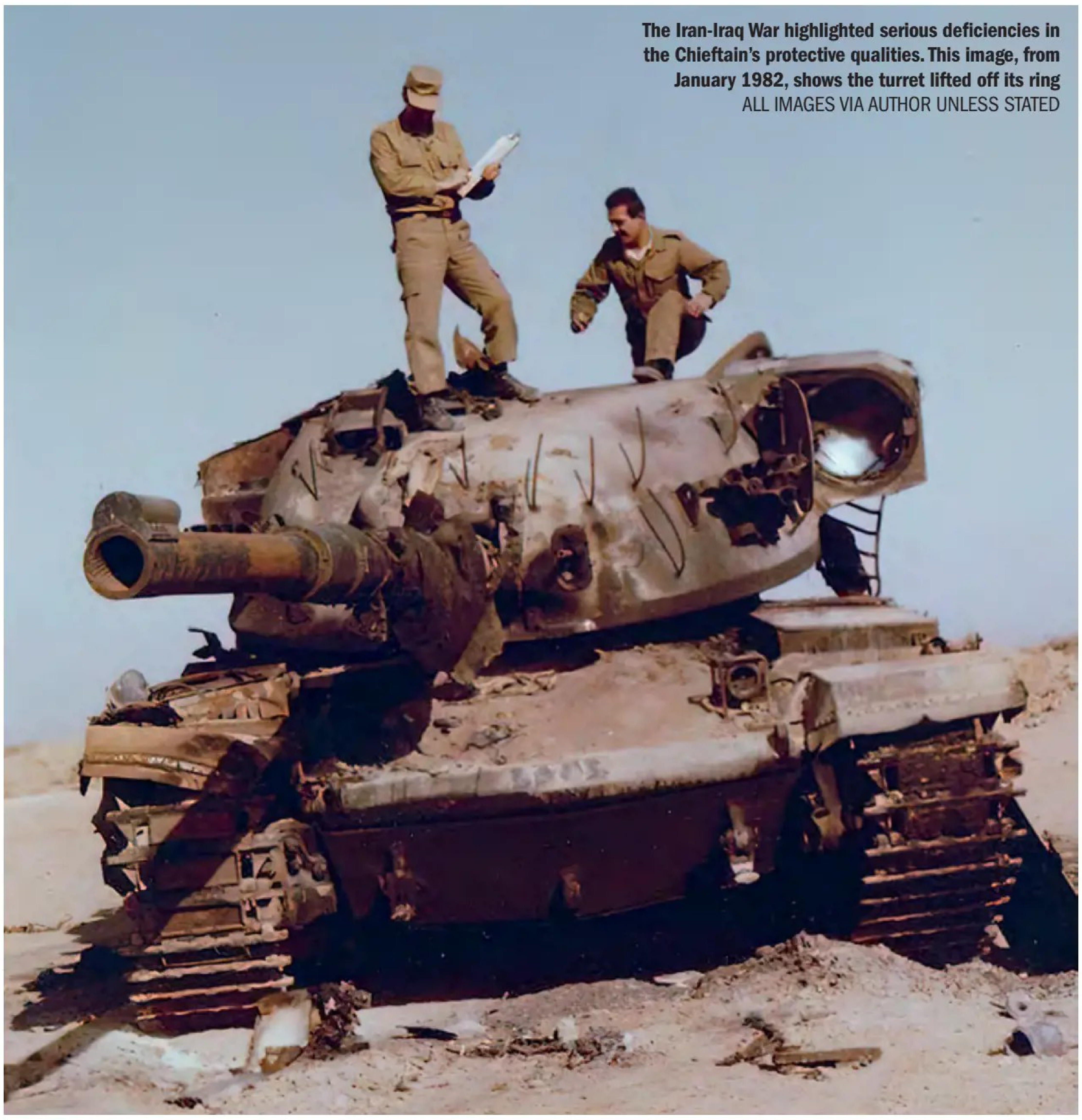
Keeping pace

The evolution of tank armour has been a continuous journey, one driven by the increasing threat of anti-tank weapons on the ever-evolving battlefield. Despite the proliferation of increasingly powerful and sophisticated man-portable anti-tank weapons and cheap, weaponised drones enabling the infantry to reclaim some dominance, the day of the tank is far from over – protection always has found ways to keep pace.

Among notable advances in armour development was Stillbrew, a Cold War innovation designed to provide enhanced protection for the Chieftain. Developed in the 1980s, Stillbrew was a form of add-on – or appliqué – composite armour that emerged as a response to the increasing effectiveness of Soviet munitions and the corresponding need to improve protection and survivability.

While appliqué protection may appear (and can be) improvised, it is a popular method of up-armouring vehicles in a way relative to threats likely to be faced or due the influence of factors such as weight and terrain. It is often factory fitted – or, at least, provision for its future installation is provided.

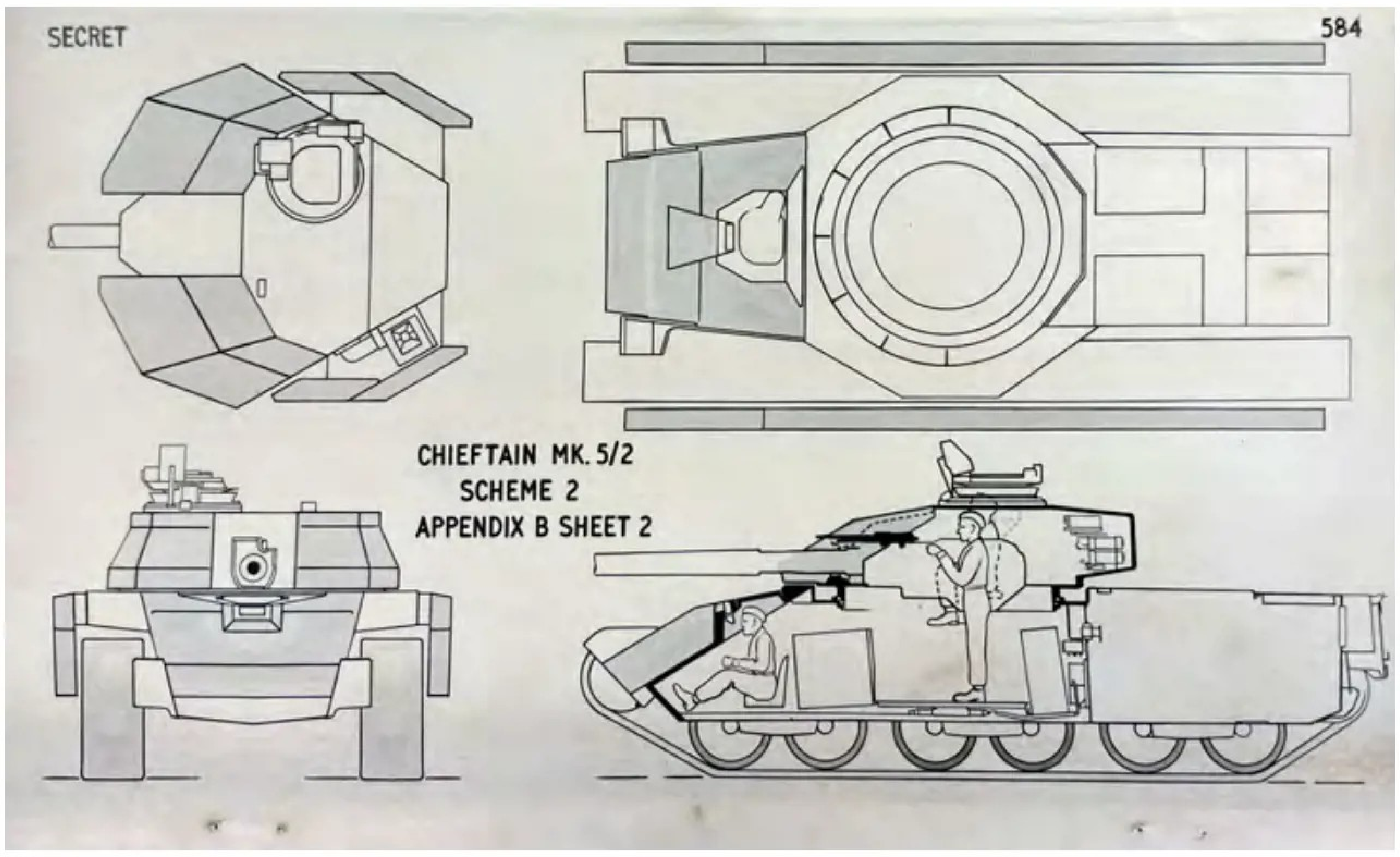
Even by 1980s standards, add-on armour was nothing new, having been widely used by all sides during World War Two. The British had long been the masters of developing appliqué armour and had produced some excellent work, ranging from the simple fixing of additional hardened plates to increase the viability of older vehicles to the work that went into ‘plastic’ armour fitted to everything from ships to trains.

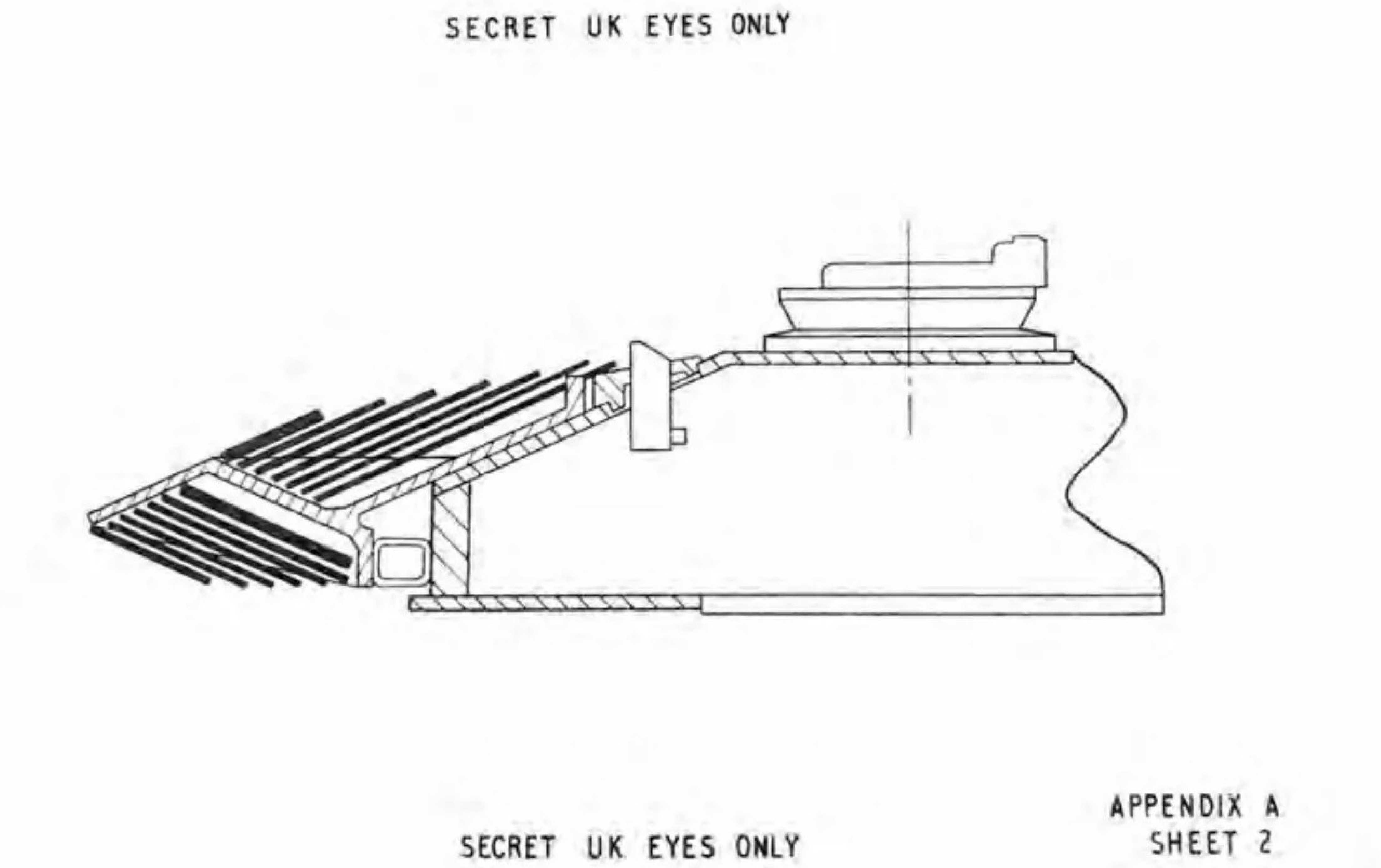


The Iran-Iraq War highlighted serious deficiencies in the Chieftain’s protective qualities. This image, from January 1982, shows the turret lifted off its ring ALL IMAGES VIA AUTHOR UNLESS STATED

Other approaches comprised studying materials of different densities such as sand, liquid, plastics, silicates and oxidising agents, as well as assessing the field modifications commonly introduced by soldiers such as track links and sandbags. However, ad hoc additions fitted in theatre were generally of dubious utility and historians continue to debate the effectiveness of using wood, concrete, scrap or track to enhance protection. The extra weight could reduce the performance of the vehicle and damage its drivetrain and suspension. Nevertheless, many crews believed their efforts were useful, and if that furnished them with confidence, perhaps it was a fair trade.

When introduced in 1967, the Chieftain was the most powerfully armed tank in service. However, by the time its notorious reliability issues had been resolved, it was falling behind defensively TOPFOTO





A 1970 study explored using Chobham armour on Chieftain, but the cost, weight, obscuration of vision ports and the sideskirts blocking access to the running gear outweighed any advantages

> *"The British had long been the masters of developing appliqué armour, ranging from the simple fixing of additional hardened plates to 'plastic' armour fitted to everything from ships to trains"*

In 1960, Dr G Harvey and J Downey of the Passive Defence Special Research group at the Fighting Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (FVRDE) made a breakthrough in composite armour. Their new armour – initially called Harvey's armour and later Chobham – would have many variants such as Burlington, Buckhorse, etc. The early version comprised steel and plastic layers separated by air pockets in an internal array. It proved highly effective against shaped charges and as effective against conventional rounds as its steel equivalent, but weighed a lot less. Despite having patented this world-class armour system, the British would not initially put it into production, but did share it with the United States.

Several new British proposals fitted with Chobham were drawn up under the 1960s Armoured Fighting Vehicles for the 80s programme, but were never built. Instead, the armour would next be shared with Germany under Project Almagest, which led to to a new joint venture, FMBT-70, to replace the Chieftain and Leopard tanks. However, this project had fallen apart by 1977 and the UK would begin to develop its own national tank, the MBT-80.

Chieftain crisis

While that had been going on, an export venture to Iran named Project 4030 had begun in 1975, following the Shah of Iran's purchase of 900 Chieftain tanks. Project 4030 would be split into three phases.

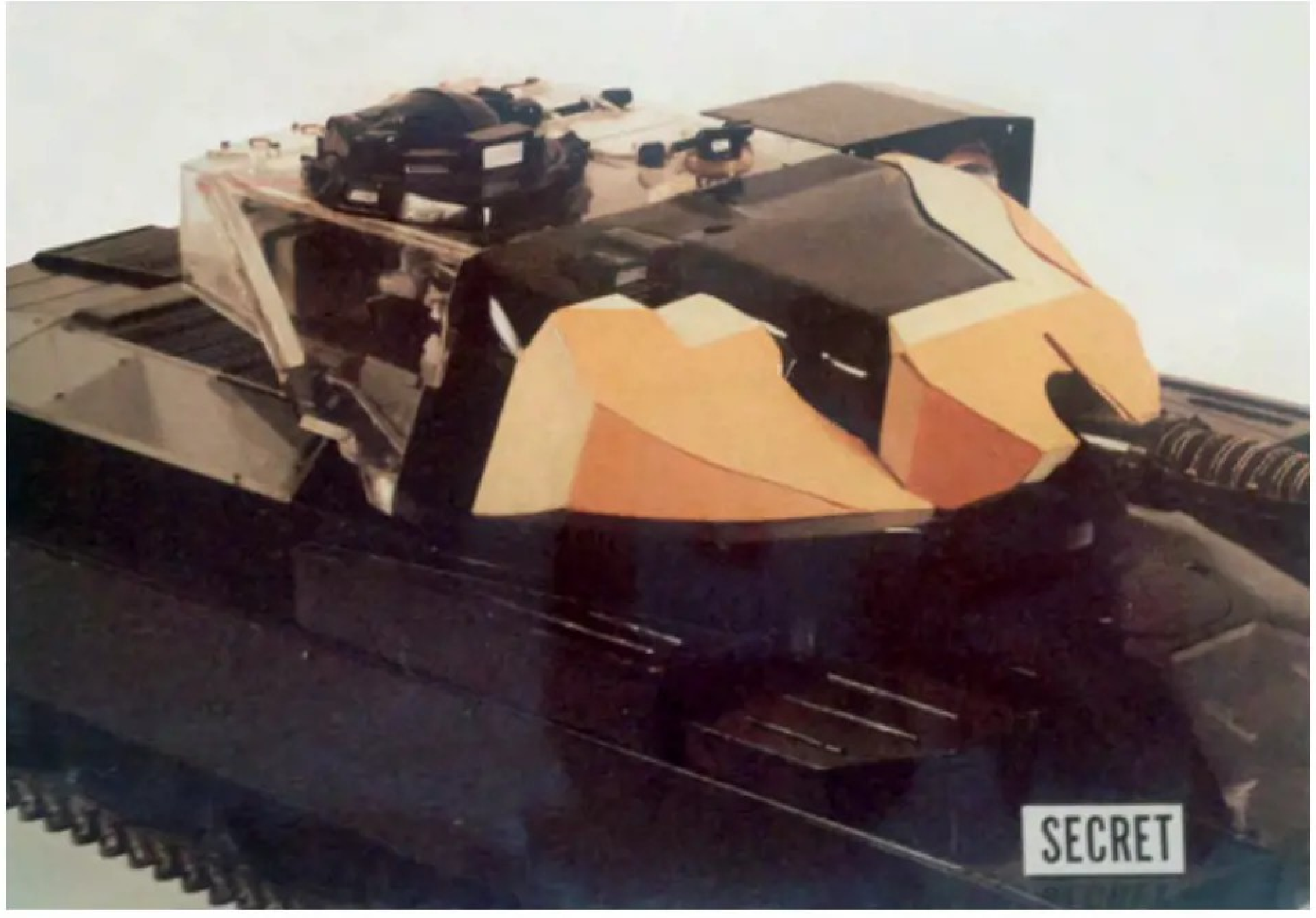
The first, 4030/1, would modify existing Iranian Chieftains to an improved standard with an upgraded engine, while work began on implementing a new Rolls-Royce CV12 TCE 800hp engine that had been undergoing tests in Britain (this design is not to be confused with the Chieftain 800). Phase two, 4030/2, would be for 125 modified Chieftains with a Rolls-Royce CV12 1,200hp engine mounted in a new modified rear, yet retaining the Chieftain turret and front, to be called Shir 1 (Lion). Finally, phase three, 4030/3 Shir 2, was to feature many improvements, including Chobham armour, of which 1,225 tanks were ordered by Iran.

The project came to a crashing halt in 1979, when the Shah was overthrown in the Islamic Revolution. Because of the new regime's anti-Western ideology, the Ayatollah cancelled the contracts and British arms sales ceased. As a result, 278 Shir 1s would be modified to become the Khalid in Jordanian service, while Shir 2 would become the FV4030/4 Challenger as a partial replacement for the Chieftain in the British Army until MBT-80 arrived.

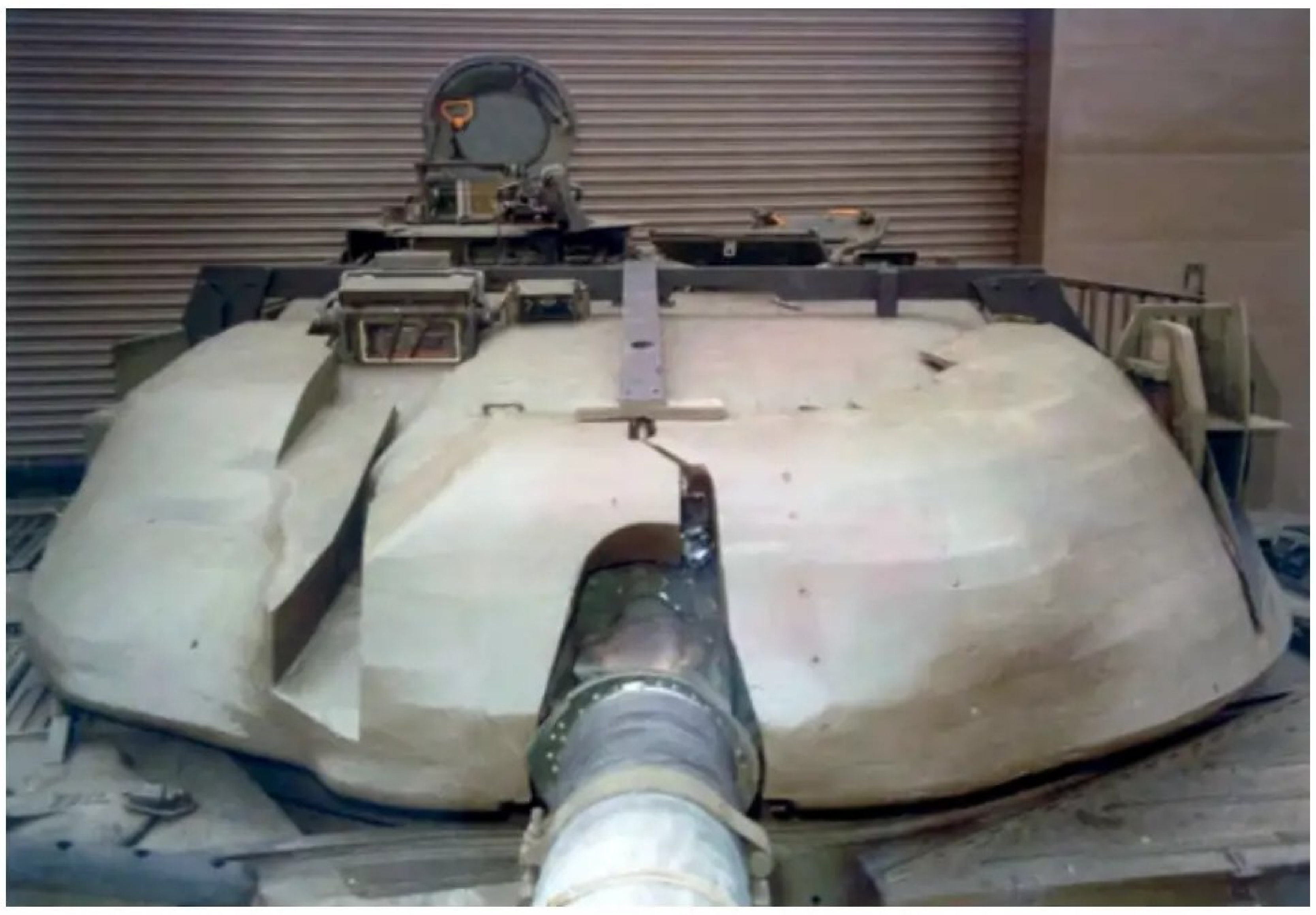
In 1980, there was a critical turning point in British tank design with the cancellation of MBT-80, leaving the army operating Chieftains until Challengers could be produced in sufficient numbers. That was going to take time, as they had been sold as a premium package whereas, in reality, there was much to be desired with only a 25% daily reliability rate. These new tanks needed a complete reworking before passing British inspection.

The same year – and critical to the Chieftain story – the Iran-Iraq War erupted, during which the tank clashed with its intended adversaries: Soviet-made T-62s and T-72s. Tactical mistakes aside, the Chieftains fared poorly, easily knocked out by Iraqi tanks at long range. The British were alerted to the fact that its only main battle tank in service was obsolete in terms of protection, yet would now serve on into the 1990s, facing threats from Soviet ammunition with between 360mm to 480mm of estimated penetrative power.

The first studies into improving the Chieftains' protective qualities began at the Military Vehicles and Engineering Establishment (MVEE) in December 1981. By March 1982, it had published *A feasibility study into increasing the ballistic protection of the Chieftain tank turret by addition of applique armour* by M Lindsay of the Concepts & Design Branch. This was approved by the assistant director, John Brewer.



The once secret model of Stillbrew produced in 1981-82 for the feasibility study. The base of the model appears to have been a prototype Chieftain with alternate engine deck, front plate and cupola



The first Project Stillbrew mock-up applied to a Chieftain, the layout hadn't been finalised to ensure the optics had the best possible visibility

The report highlighted the need to add steel appliqué armour to increase path length to resist 115mm and 125mm APFSDS (sabot) rounds – path length simply being the amount of material a projectile must pass through. Kinetic energy rounds such as sabot will roughly penetrate steel for their own length, plus or minus 15%, at average engagement ranges. It was estimated that 1.65 tonnes of steel would increase armour performance against 115mm APFSDS tungsten rounds by 45%, while 2.25 tonnes would improve performance against 125mm rounds by 25%. Both patterns could quickly be fitted during a base overhaul. As the penetration of the 115mm rounds was known, the base armour plus the add-on blocks had to total at least 360mm. This added an additional 50% to the turret's armour weight, while significantly greater thickness was required with a corresponding 130% path weight increase to keep out 125mm rounds.

Steel selection

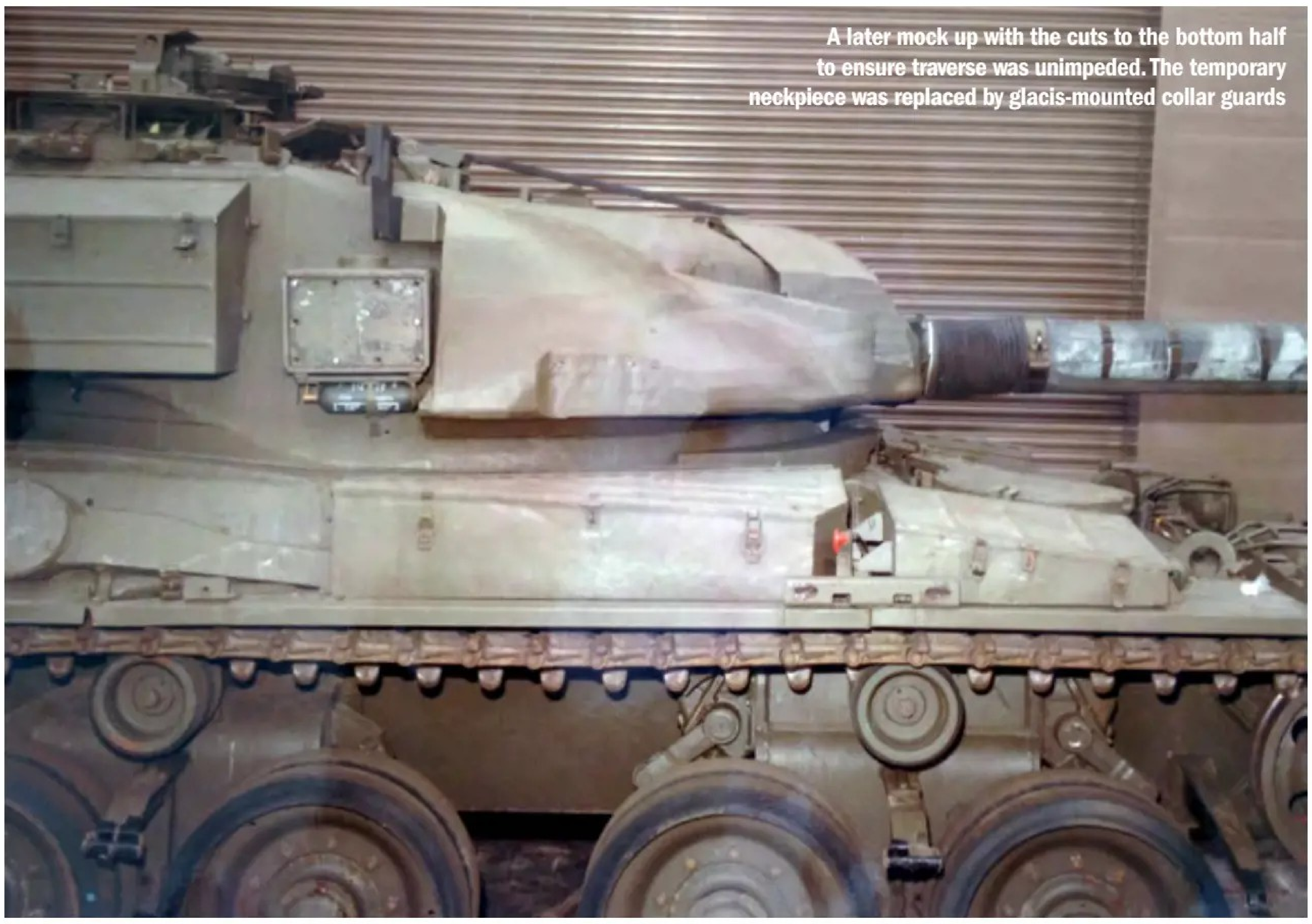
As the new armour packages were designed to defeat long rod kinetic energy rounds and not HEAT (shaped charge) rounds as often stated, the materials used could be of a simpler design and not block vision ports as the early Chobham had. The blocks could be moulded to fit the irregular cast turret shape, enabling for openings with minimal loss of protection.

However, the shape of the Chieftain's turret armour was still problematic as it varied widely across relatively small areas. The left side was between 360mm to 232mm thick and the right 360mm down to 228mm. It was believed the cast steel needed for the add-on blocks had to be 10% thicker to attain rolled homogeneous armour (RHA) equivalence, thus the blocks would need to range from 36mm to 150mm in RHA steel or up to 167mm in cast steel to meet minimum requirements. Both versions would have been mounted atop a 20mm rubber backing sheet to get a uniform 360mm minimum path length of projection.

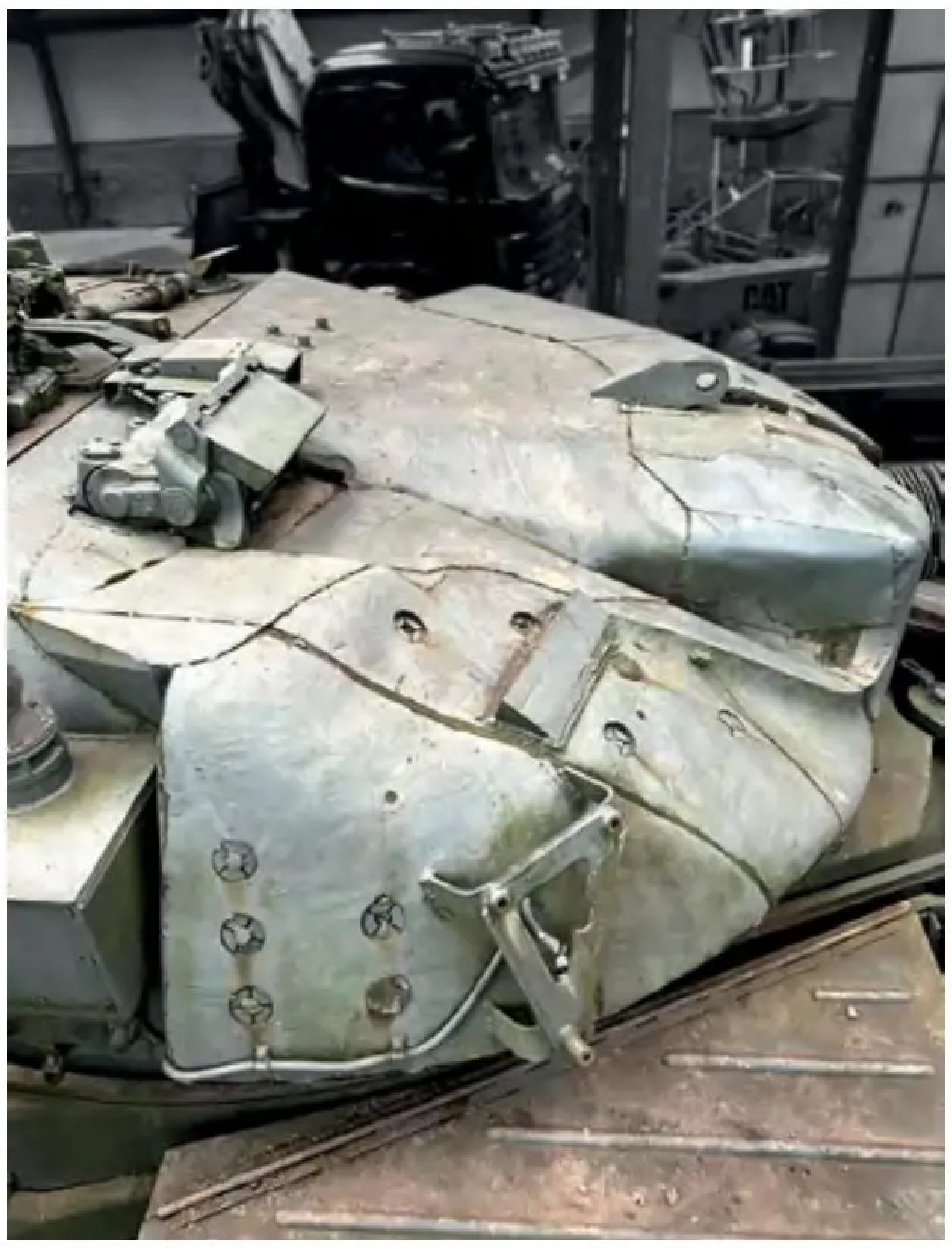
To reach the maximum desired thickness, some 268mm of appliqué RHA steel or 298mm of cast steel would be needed, plus the 20mm spacer, to meet 480mm equivalence. Both early designs required areas to be cut away for the turret optics and, due to the turret needing to traverse, the lower half was also cut away, exposing the turret ring, which needed to be accounted for in survivability studies.

IT.80 steel the preferred option as it was familiar and its strengths and properties were known. It was also the cheapest option. Alternatively, IT.90 armoured steel castings could be made in several pieces and ballistics tests confirmed its effectiveness. It was also cheap and could be moulded to fit the tanks' contours, but weighed marginally more as it needed to be 10% thicker. IT.140 forged steel was deemed suboptimal on a protection/cost methodology, while aluminium cost considerably more than steel and offered less protection. High hardness plate steel (500 BHN) was dismissed as no experience existed in casting or forging the material and it wasn't certain that it would survive multiple hits. Finally, ceramic tiles were considered, but there was limited ballistic data available and additional research was needed, while fitting them to curved areas would be difficult and expensive.

The discussion then turned to how to attach the armour package. Previous efforts had seen the British fit spaced plates to Conquerors and Centurions, installed a set distance from the hull with a resilient steel channel between them, but this wouldn't be possible on the Chieftain, so it was decided to use a rubber-backed, bolted configuration. This offered several advantages, being easier to fit, remove, repair or upgrade, while the rubber layer conformed between the two plates, enabling a firm fit even if there were slight geometric differences between the turret shape and add-on plates. The rubber layer



A later mock up with the cuts to the bottom half to ensure traverse was unimpeded. The temporary neckpiece was replaced by glacis-mounted collar guards



Stillbrew armour without its cosmetic cover. The multiple segments are clearly visible as are the distinctive fixing studs and the mastic filler. The cable running to the relocated smoke launcher mount can be seen on the lower left SEB BRADY

had nothing to do with NERA (non-explosive reactive armour), although the package did offer a marginal increase in HEAT protection.

Once the basics had been decided, the team had to evaluate how other features would be affected, such as the rate of turret traverse and reliability. The news was good: the extra weight would not place undue stress on the turret ring and rotation speed would change by just a tenth of a degree per second. Moreover, other than relocating smoke launchers and redesigning the mantlet cover, bellows and central lifting eye, little extra work was required. As for reliability and mobility, the new turret's weight did add to the tank's bridge weight class, but other than a slight 0.04kg/cm² increase in ground pressure, there were no undue reliability or mobility issues.

> *"A model was made using the new armour package, with recommendations made that firing trials should begin at Kirkcudbright as quickly as possible"*

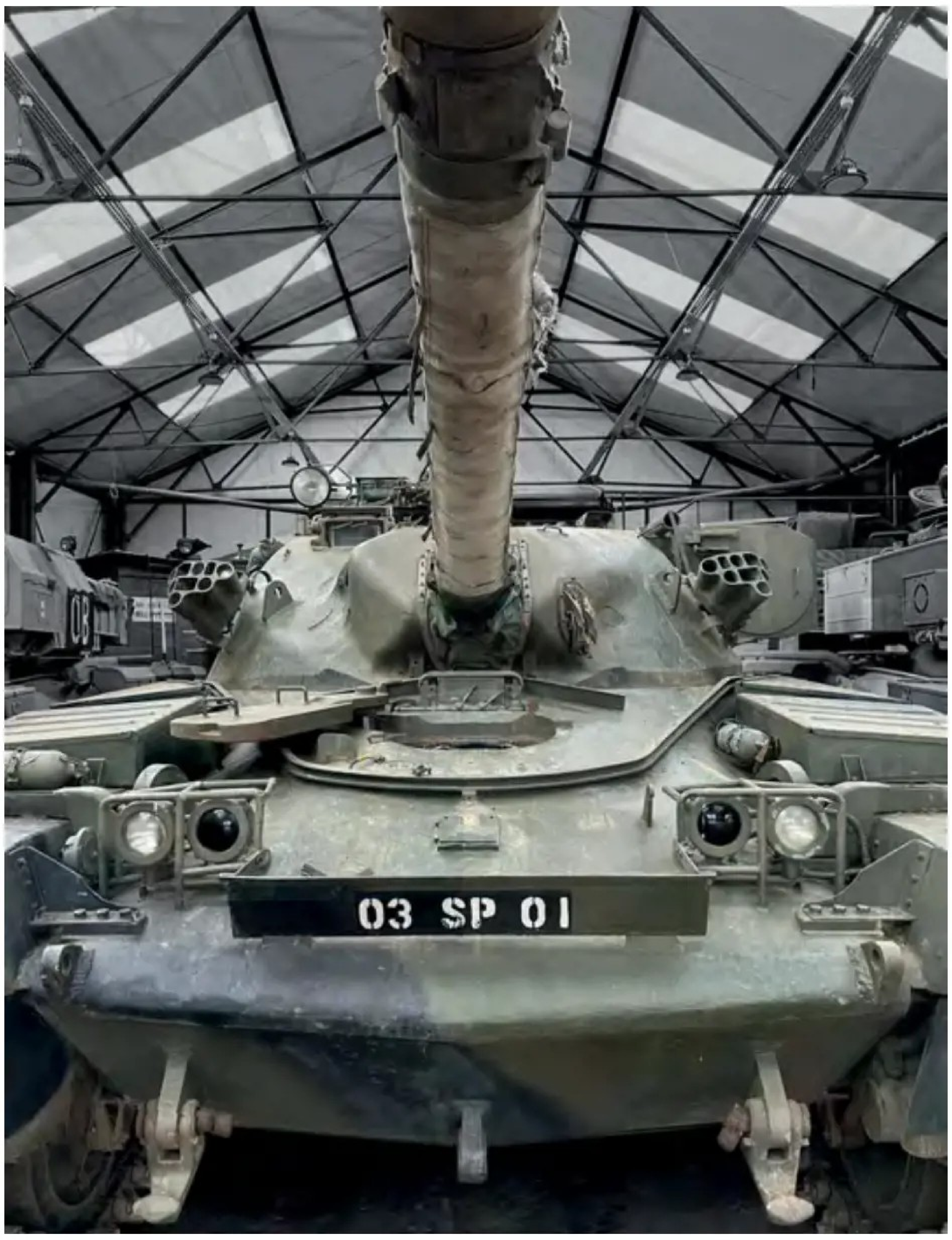
From factory to front

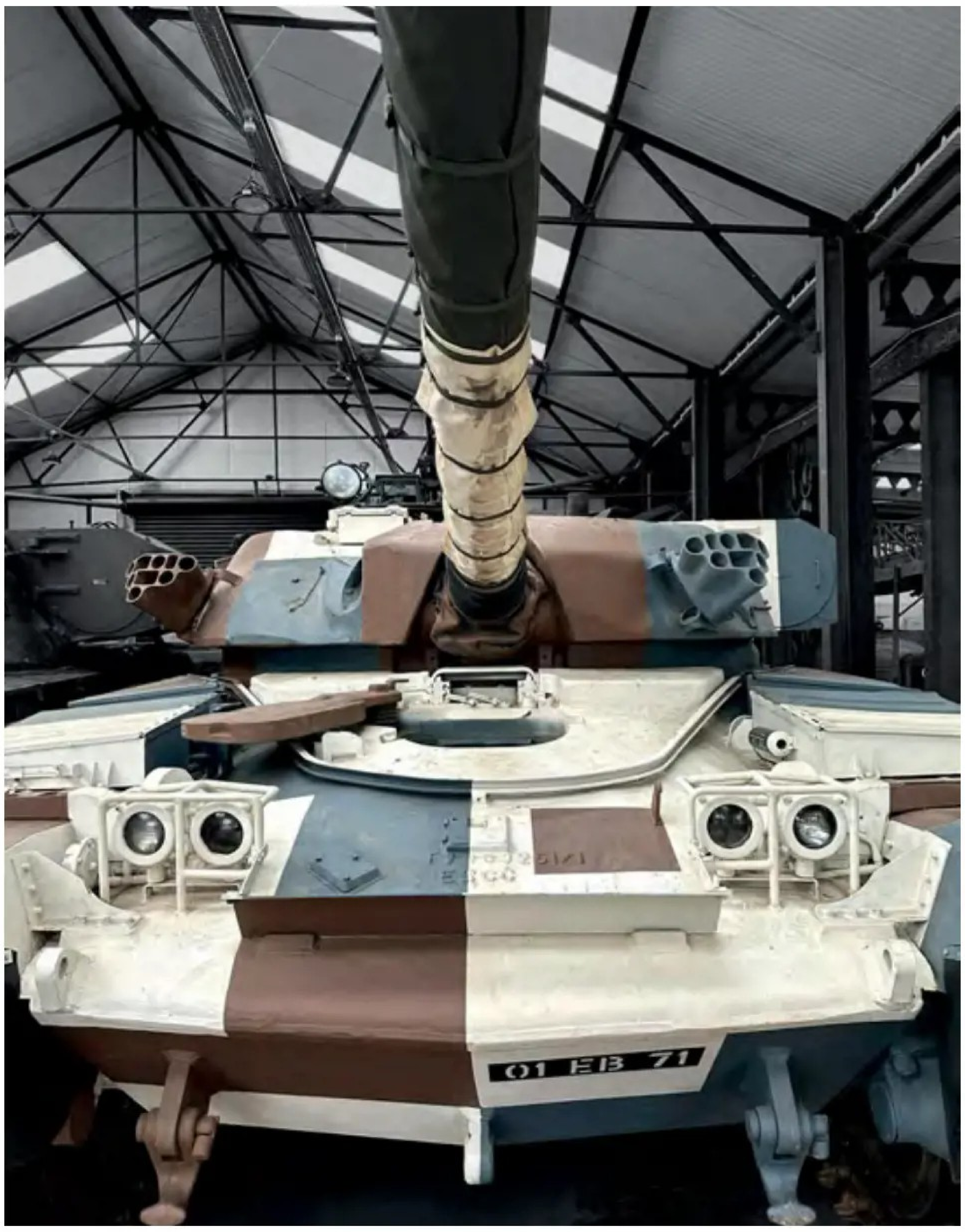
A model was made using the new armour package, with recommendations made that firing trials should begin at Kirkcudbright as quickly as possible using both British APFSDS (PPL64) or American M735 rounds.

July 1983 saw a Project Authorisation and Control System (PACS) raised by MVEE and a Development Cost Plan (DCP) amended further in August to find the best balance of cost versus protection, using cast steel armour against kinetic energy attacks over the front arc of the turret, with weight to remain within the 2 to 2.5 tonne range. This was followed in October by the first MVEE trials to test multi-hit capability, which proved resistance was better than anticipated. In November, the first General Staff Requirement draft was issued with the new armour entitled CAA (Chieftain Additional Armour). Three sets were ordered in December 1983.

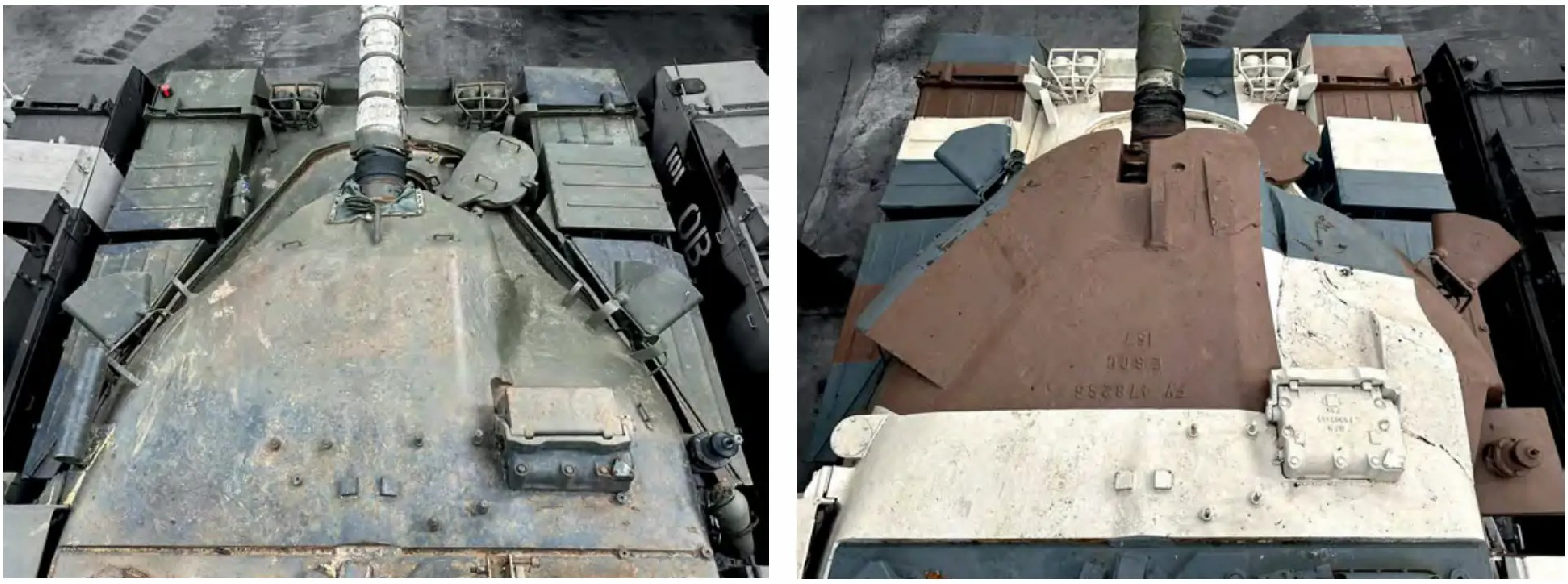
January 1984 saw a DCP issued to the Royal Ordnance Factory Leeds to confirm the viability of the system and, in May, the GSR was officially put into place as GST(OE) 3988 CAA. The OE – Operational Emergency – status served to indicate an urgent in-service date, with development and production authorised at Leeds. In October, the first live firing trials took place against CAA with RARDE at Kirkcudbright and confirmed multi-hit capability from 105mm APFSDS at point-blank range, and that it was proof against 120mm rounds at 1,000m.

The tests rigs had proven that the combination of two cast plates with a rubber interlayer was more effective than suggested in earlier estimations. The new armour was evaluated to require an optimal 420mm path thickness, with the rubber layer increased to 60mm, preventing the rear bulge from prizing the panel away.





The upper glacis and turret front of a Chieftain Mk.3 (left), a variant that predated Stillbrew. Although once considered the best protected tank in NATO, by 1980 it was rapidly becoming obsolete. Right is a Chieftain Mk.10 with Stillbrew, showing its dramatically different profile. Collar guards have been welded to the hull each side of the driver's periscope SEB BRADY



A Mk.3 turret without Stillbrew (left), showing the original cast armour. The turret's unusual shape is evident, as are the symmetrical smoke dischargers. On the right is a Mk.10 turret with Stillbrew, showing the thickness of the add-on armour and relocated right-hand smoke discharger SEB BRADY

By October 1984, the first trials vehicle (V1) had arrived at Leeds for tests and, by January 1985, ballistic fences had been incorporated to deflect spalling away from the optics. The material chosen was RARDE Type 823 steel in five armour panels totalling 2.2 tonnes, attached to the turret using threaded studs and conical nuts. Cosmetic plates covered the outside, with mastic used to prevent water ingress.

Electrical and mechanical engineer regulations team EME-7 confirmed the first retrofit of CAA at their workshop base on turret T1 on January 30, 1985. February saw live-firing trials of turret T1, where it surpassed the requirements, followed by trials on turret T2 in May, which confirmed that additional protection on the turret neck was required. The frontal turret ring was given a two-part collar, welded to the glacis on either side of the driver's hatch. This was later replaced with a raised section on the upper glacis. The first user trials began with the ATDU in May 1985.

The first production tranche was placed with Royal Ordnance Leeds in July with limited acceptance issued in August. However, in October, it was decided not to fit the new Visual and Infrared Screening Smoke System (VIRSS), which was being trialled on the Challenger. By December 1985 and January 1986, both V1 and V2 had completed their 6,000km reliability trials and ATDU published its final Phase 2 trials reports.

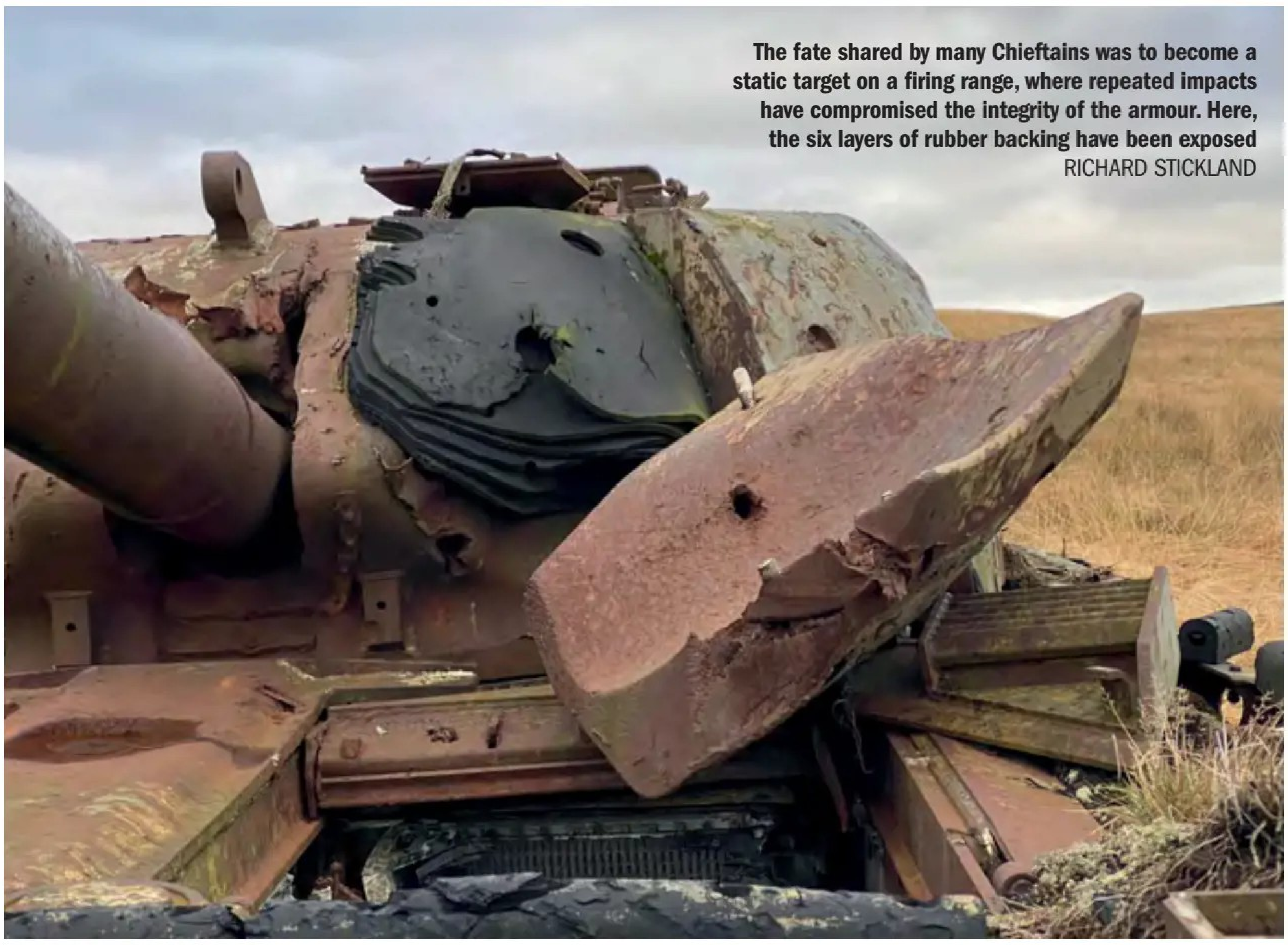
Towards the end of its development CAA was renamed officially as Project Stillbrew, an amalgamation of Colonel Nigel Still from the Operational Research team and John Brewer, assistant director of the Concepts & Design team. The first retrofitted vehicles entered service by mid-1986 and Stillbrew was widely mounted on Mk.10, Mk.11 and Mk.12 Chieftains, furnishing British crews with a significant boost in protection.

Tideturner?

How effective would Stillbrew have been had the Cold War turned hot? That's a matter of conjecture. It is quite difficult to gauge how well Stillbrew-equipped Chieftains would have performed in battle, as there are many variables.

On paper, the system offered a substantial increase in protection against certain munitions, but it is worth considering that although it was Iraqi ammunition that had sparked the fear of perforating the Chieftain, Iraq was using old, hand-me-down rounds at the time. Several new Soviet rounds would have been capable of penetrating Stillbrew – and at long range. Fortunately, such shells were not often issued and the add-on armour would have improved resilience noticeably against the intended (and more common) threat. Additionally, as Stillbrew was relatively cheap and easy to produce and could be installed quickly without the need for extensive modifications to turrets, its issue would not have imposed any great strain on the British Army's supply system.

Luckily, the threat to which Stillbrew-equipped Chieftains were devised to counter never materialised and the tanks were retired from service in 1995. Their successor, Challenger 1, incorporated Chobham armour, which is deemed to have been highly successful, although details regarding its capabilities remains classified. An improved Chobham protects the Challenger 2, which is currently in service, yet theatre-specific add-on protections were still installed on those that were deployed to Iraq. 'Show me a 10ft wall and I'll show you a 12ft ladder', summarises rather neatly the offence/defence arms race typical of modern tank and anti-tank development. BW



The fate shared by many Chieftains was to become a static target on a firing range, where repeated impacts have compromised the integrity of the armour. Here, the six layers of rubber backing have been exposed RICHARD STICKLAND

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TOPPED AND TAILED

HMS *Javelin* saw more action in seven years than other destroyers saw in two world wars – and refused to sink despite being reduced to a drifting hulk

Words: **Derek Fox**

The first explosion tore through her bow, the second crippled her stern. Dead in the water, and with two score of her crew killed or dying, HMS *Javelin* was miraculously still afloat. Her crew and shattered remains appeared to be held together by sheer defiance as a dramatic salvage effort and one of the most stunning comebacks in the history of World War Two unfolded.

Javelin was a J-class destroyer that entered service as World War Two was about to erupt. Like most other Royal Navy destroyers, she had an active war and, depending on your point of view, was either a very lucky or very unlucky ship, surviving numerous episodes and even a 'mutiny'.

Ordered in March 1937 under the 1936 build programme, she was laid down by John Brown & Co in Clydebank on October 11. Launched on December 21, 1938. *Javelin's* build cost (excluding weapons) was £391,570. After contractor and acceptance trials she was worked up at Portland under Commander Anthony Pugsley and on June 10, 1939, joined the Home Fleet's 7th Destroyer Flotilla.

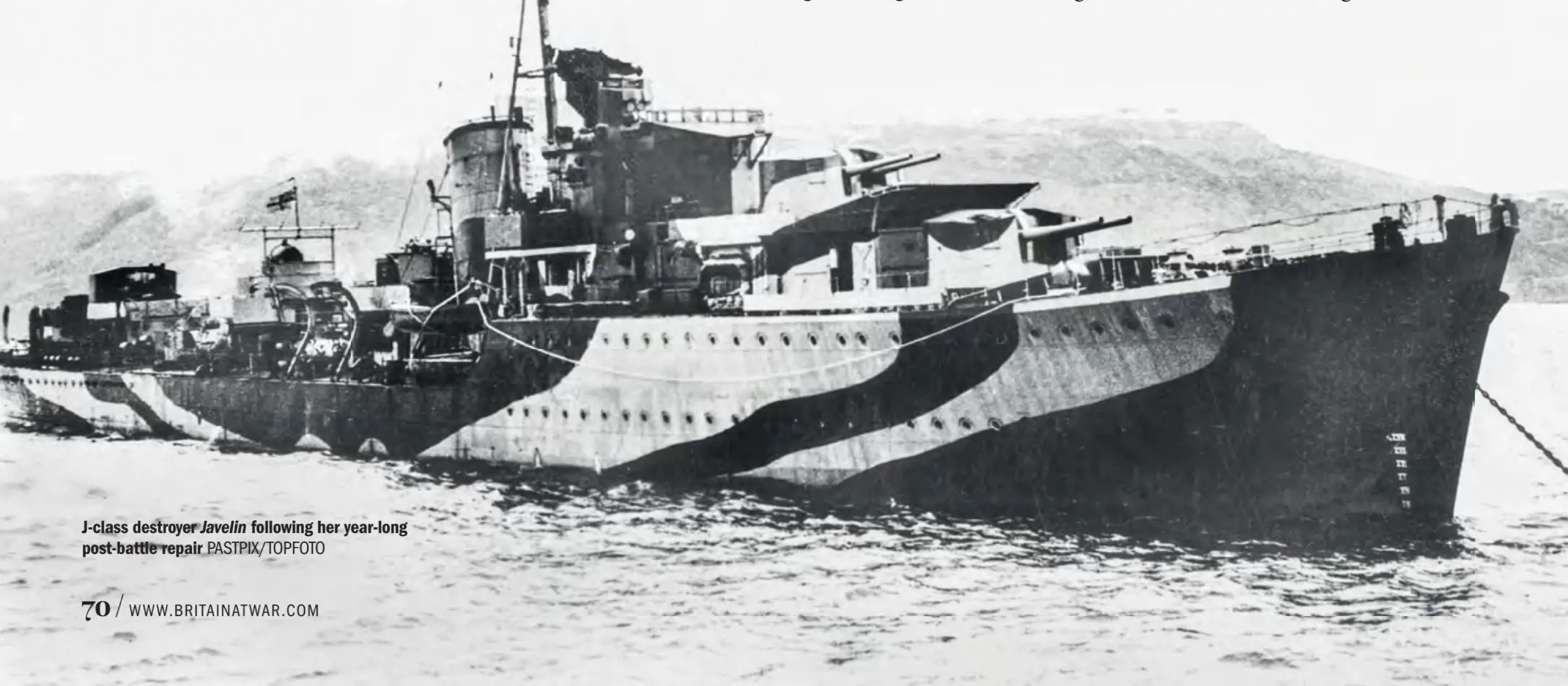
J-class destroyers displaced 2,370 tons at full load and were 356ft long, with a 35¾ft beam and 12½ft draught. Their propulsion was provided by two geared steam turbines and a pair of Admiralty three-drum boilers delivering 44,000shp to two shafts, producing a stated top speed of 36kts. Complement was 183 officers and men. Armament was relatively heavy, comprising three twin 4.7in guns, a quad-barrel two-pounder 'pom-pom' anti-aircraft gun, a pair of quad .5in Vickers anti-aircraft machine guns, two quintuple 21in torpedo launchers and 20 depth charges.

In September 1939, *Javelin* deployed to the North Sea, cruising Norwegian waters. On September 22, while patrolling in the Skagerrak with cruisers *Glasgow* and *Southampton*, she collided with her sister ship *Jersey*, sustaining some damage requiring she be taken under tow and repaired at the Hawthorn-Leslie shipyard on the Tyne.

After repairs, *Javelin* suffered a second collision on October 22 while running trials; she collided with the merchant vessel SS *Mordant*, killing two of the destroyer's crew. *Javelin* was again taken in tow by the sister ship *Jupiter* to Smith's Dock at Middlesbrough for repairs lasting through to January 1940.

Prowling off Prawle

That year was to prove a busy one for *Javelin*, as along with convoy escort duties and North Sea patrols, the ship was heavily engaged in the Norwegian campaign. On April 29, she escorted *Glasgow* as she embarked King Haakon



J-class destroyer *Javelin* following her year-long post-battle repair PASTPIX/TOPFOTO

Javelin's start to the war was inauspicious, colliding with sister ship *Jersey* (shown) off Norway ROYAL NAVY

VII of Norway, members of the Norwegian government and gold bullion to safety further south (before onward evacuations to Britain). *Javelin*, with sister ship *Jackal*, returned to provide fire support for troop landings before returning to Scapa Flow. On May 1, *Javelin* transferred to the 1st Destroyer Flotilla at Harwich.

On May 27, the ship hurried to the Channel and was transferred to Dover Command to assist in Operation Dynamo, the evacuation of the British Army from Dunkirk and other French ports. The next day, she approached the shore and took off as many soldiers as could be crammed aboard, ferrying 900 men home and a further 850 on May 30. *Javelin* was then withdrawn from Dunkirk and proceeded to Sheerness where she carried out anti-invasion patrols. On June 5, the destroyer headed for Hull for maintenance during which the Type 286 surface search radar was installed. On completion, *Javelin* transferred to the 5th Destroyer Flotilla along with *Jackal, Jupiter, Jupiter, Kelvin, Kashmir* and *Kipling*.

> *"Of Javelin's original length, just 155ft of her hull remained – but she remained afloat"*

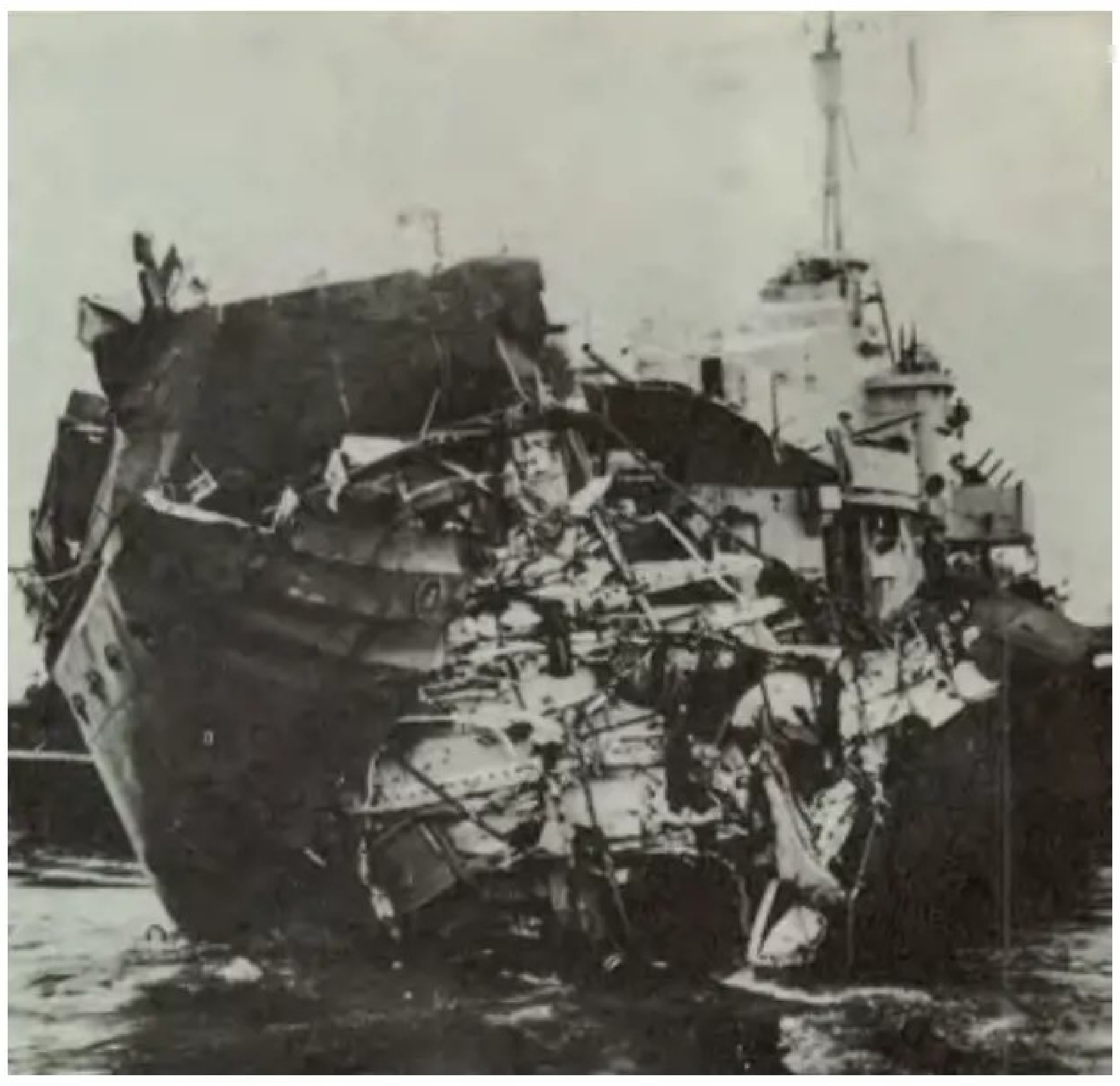
The ship spent the next few months providing escort to convoys and capital ships, along with interception patrols. On October 10, she accompanied the battleship HMS *Revenge* during Operation Medium, the night bombardment of Cherbourg. During the 20-minute bombardment, which started at 0330hrs, the battleship fired 120 15in shells. The action was not limited to her, with the escorting destroyers themselves sending more than 800 4.7in rounds during the first few minutes of the bombardment before forming a defensive screen. German defences returned fire, but no ships in the group were hit.

Javelin once again entered refit, returning to the flotilla at Plymouth after passing post-refit trials. Overnight on November 24-25, a trio of German zerstörer (destroyers), the Z20 *Karl Galster*, Z10 *Hans Lody* and Z4 *Richard Bietzen*, had sortied from their base in Brest and

Several destroyers at Dover, ready to offload troops from Dunkirk IWM/GETTY

Allied destroyers – including *Javelin* (shown) – lifted the lion's share of troops from Dunkirk TOPFOTO

Overnight on October 10-11, 1940, *Javelin* supported HMS *Revenge* in its bombardment of Cherbourg. Here *Javelin's* sister, *Jupiter*, lends her guns to the barrage OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH



***Javelin* caught two torpedoes during the night action with *Hans Lody*, losing her bow and stern sections** AUTHOR

headed for Land's End. As an aside, *Karl Galster* was the sole survivor of the Type 1936 destroyer class, her five sisters sunk in naval battles off Narvik in April 1940.

These were powerfully armed ships, mounting five 4.7in (12cm) guns and two quadruple 20.8in (53.3cm) torpedo launchers, and had transferred to Brest in preparation for Operation Seelöwe (Sealion), the planned amphibious invasion of Britain. The ships were discovered by a patrol aircraft but were able to attack fishing trawlers near Wolf Rock. The Belgian trawler *Marguerite Simonne* was sunk, and the British trawler *Lent Lily* was damaged. Shortly after, they attacked a small convoy from which the Dutch tanker *Apollonia* was sunk, and the Norwegian merchant *Stadion II* was damaged. Having received the news of the raiders, *Javelin* and the majority of the flotilla sortied from Plymouth to intercept the Germans. The British deployed in a line, but could not locate the enemy and returned to base without firing a shot.

On November 29, those German ships returned to the same area, attacking two tugs towing a barge, sinking one tug (*The Aid*), the barge (*CBX110*) and damaging the second tug, *Abeille XIV*. However, this time the British were waiting. At 0553hrs, gunfire was heard off Prawle Point and *Jackal* and *Javelin* reported sighting three unknown ships. Any doubt as to their identity was dispelled when muzzle flashes lit up the night sky; the Germans opened fire first, and each zerstörer also launched four torpedoes. Ten missed, but two, fired by *Hans Lody*, headed straight for *Javelin*.

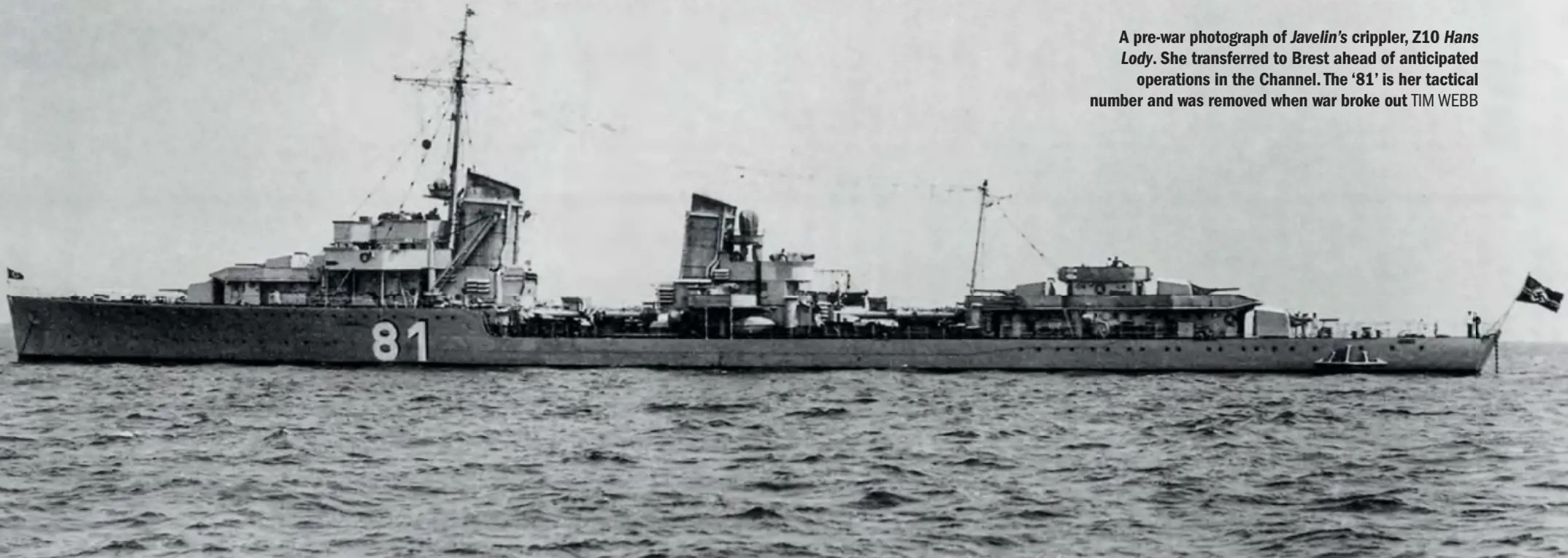
The first explosion tore through her bow, destroying the whole section forward of 'B' turret. The second crippled her stern, starting fires and detonating a magazine. Of *Javelin's* original length, just 155ft of her hull remained – but she remained afloat with her crew taken off by *Jackal*.

The British gave chase to the retreating Germans before they came under air attack and were forced to end the pursuit. Somehow still refusing to sink, *Javelin* was towed into Plymouth by the tugs *Caroline Moller* from Falmouth and the Plymouth-based *Retort* – with *Kashmir* providing escort. At 1130hrs, the ships were attacked by a Dornier Do 17, but it was shot down by a Spitfire. At 1420hrs there was another attack by a Do 17 and a Junkers Ju 88, but again this was unsuccessful, the aircraft intercepted by Spitfires that downed the Dornier. At 1435hrs a final attack was made by a Ju 88 that landed four bombs near *Javelin* before being damaged and driven off by a 234 Squadron Spitfire.

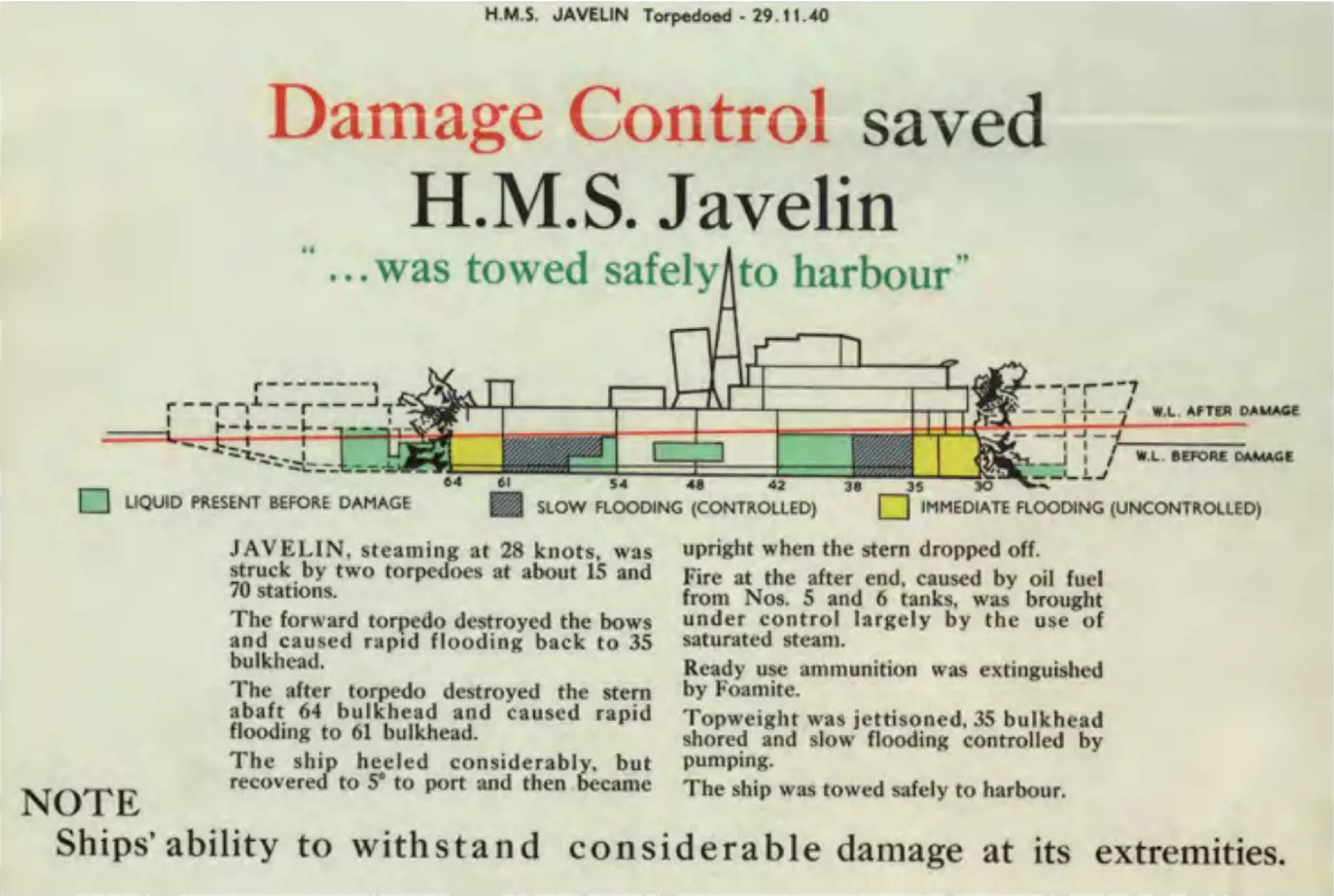
The stricken destroyer arrived at Plymouth on November 30. While the ship had made it, 46 of her company had not. However, one survivor was Captain Lord Mountbatten, who, as commander of the flotilla, was on board.

Going east

Incredibly, considering the vast and ongoing shipbuilding programme, *Javelin*



A pre-war photograph of *Javelin's* crippler, Z10 *Hans Lody*. She transferred to Brest ahead of anticipated operations in the Channel. The '81' is her tactical number and was removed when war broke out TIM WEBB



H.M.S. JAVELIN Torpedoed - 29.11.40

Damage Control saved
H.M.S. Javelin
"...was towed safely to harbour"

🟩 LIQUID PRESENT BEFORE DAMAGE
▨ SLOW FLOODING (CONTROLLED)
🟨 IMMEDIATE FLOODING (UNCONTROLLED)

JAVELIN, steaming at 28 knots, was struck by two torpedoes at about 15 and 70 stations.

The forward torpedo destroyed the bows and caused rapid flooding back to 35 bulkhead.

The after torpedo destroyed the stern abaft 64 bulkhead and caused rapid flooding to 61 bulkhead.

The ship heeled considerably, but recovered to 5° to port and then became upright when the stern dropped off.

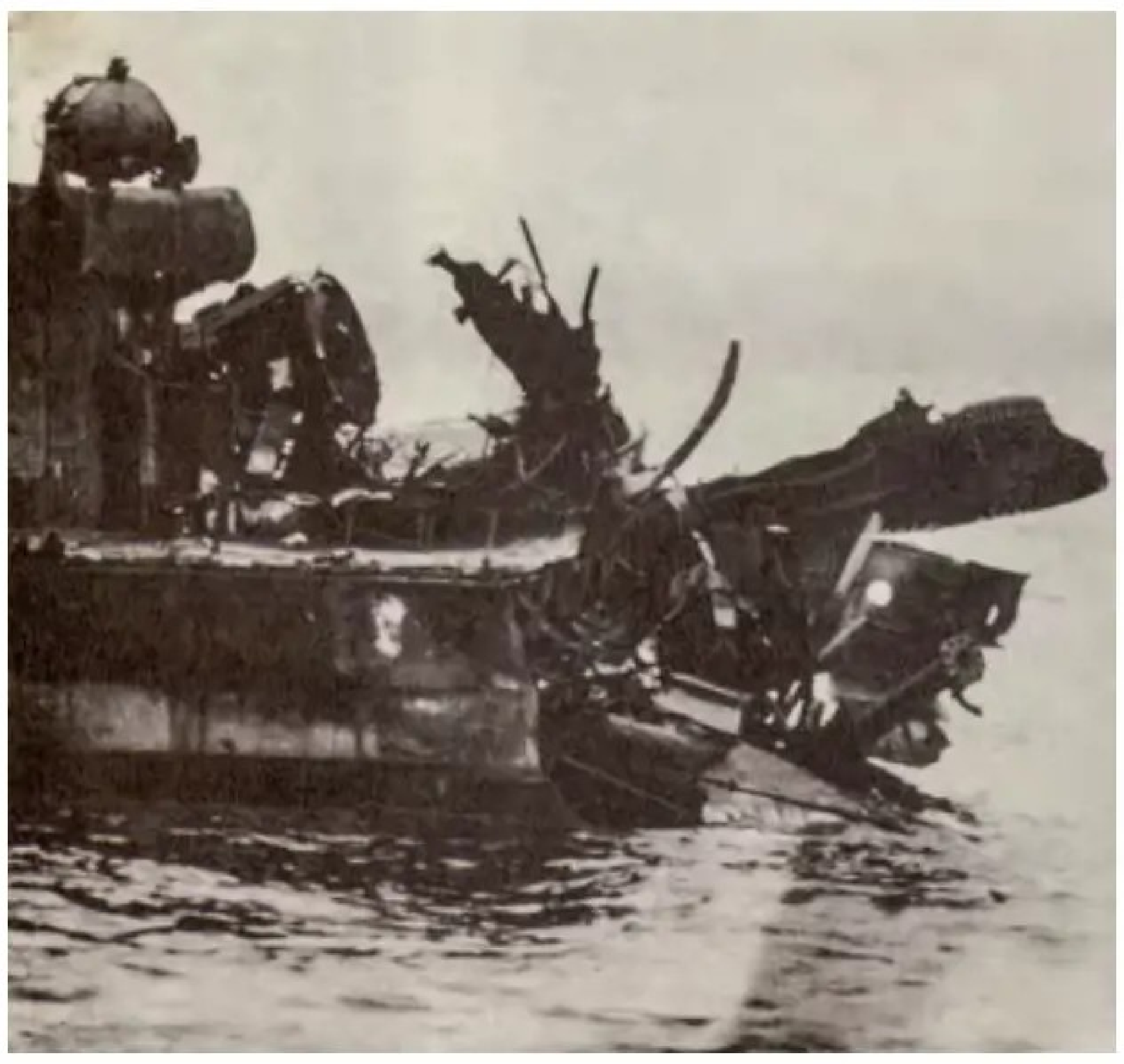
Fire at the after end, caused by oil fuel from Nos. 5 and 6 tanks, was brought under control largely by the use of saturated steam.

Ready use ammunition was extinguished by Foamite.

Topweight was jettisoned, 35 bulkhead shored and slow flooding controlled by pumping.

The ship was towed safely to harbour.

NOTE
Ships' ability to withstand considerable damage at its extremities.



ABOVE LEFT: **An official HMSO-published diagram identifying the damage to *Javelin*, the extent of her flooding, and reason for survival: her crew's effective damage control** AUTHOR

ABOVE RIGHT: **The remains of *Javelin's* stern following the torpedo hit** AUTHOR

BELOW LEFT: ***Javelin's* commander during the ill-fated night action was Commander 'Tony' Pugsley. He is shown here in 1945 at Buckingham Palace; having been made a Companion of the Bath and having received a second bar to his DSO. In 1951, he became a rear-admiral** SIMON PUGSLEY

BELOW RIGHT: **HMS *Kelvin*, which, with *Javelin*, sent an 11-ship convoy to the bottom of the Med** ARTHUR CONRY

was deemed economically repairable. She spent all of 1941 at Devonport receiving new bow and stern sections, and finally in January 1942 the ship began post-refit trials before joining the Home Fleet in February based at Scapa Flow.

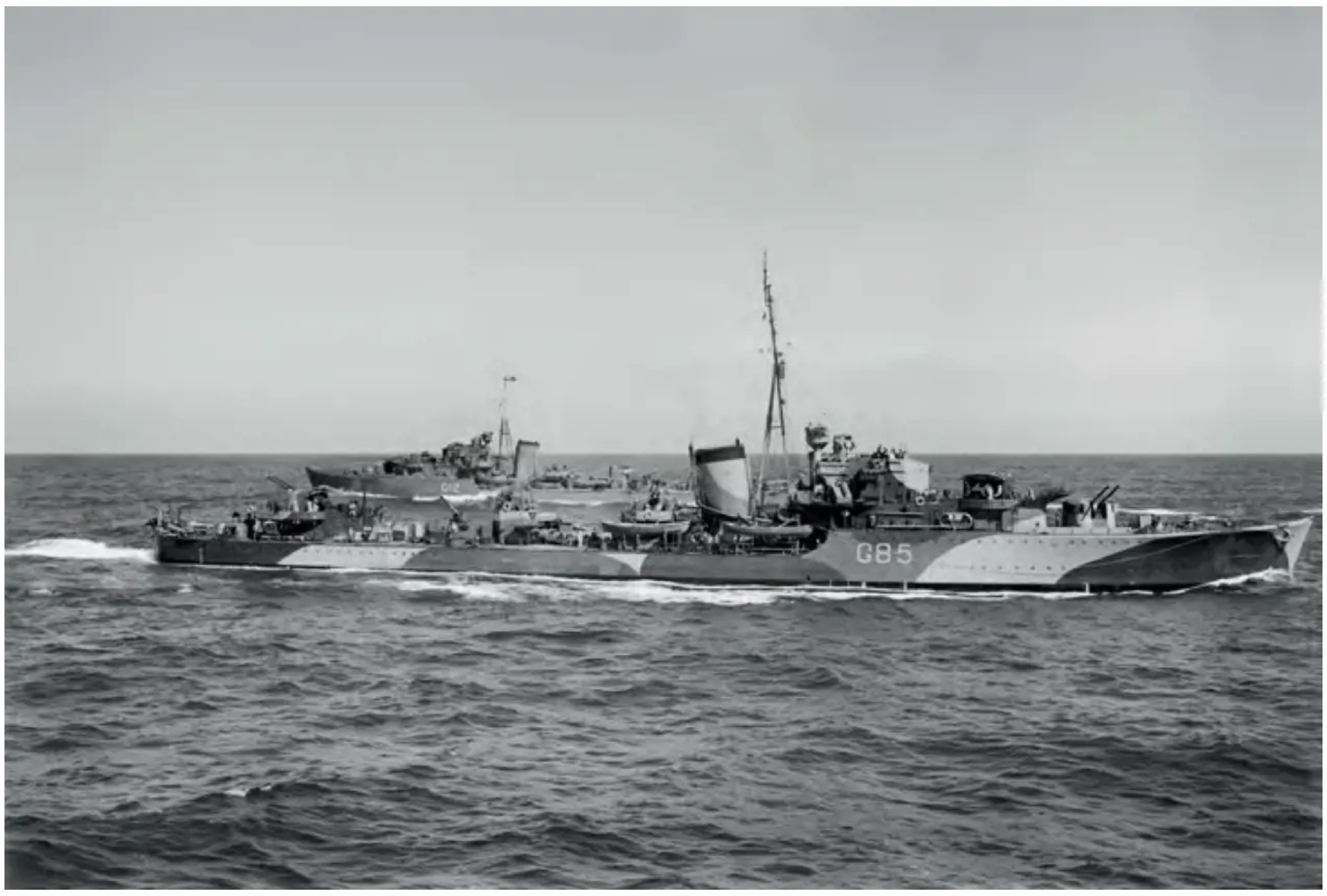
On March 1, *Javelin* deployed along with other destroyers as the screen for the aircraft carrier *Victorious*, battleships *King George V* and *Duke of York*, battlecruiser *Renown* and cruisers *Berwick* and *Kenya*, which provided distant cover for Convoy PQ12 to Murmansk, and then for the returning QP8. On completion, she returned to Scapa where she was nominated for service in support of the planned landings in Madagascar. On March 23 she departed in company with the destroyers *Inconstant* and *Pakenham* to join the large Convoy WS17 as part of the screen for the carrier *Illustrious* and heavy cruiser *Shropshire*. The convoy arrived at Freetown on April 6 and on April 9, *Javelin* left Freetown with the battleship *Malaya* to escort Convoy WS17A to Durban, arriving on April 22nd.

The main body of the assault forces destined for Madagascar departed Durban in two convoys: Convoy Y (Slow) left on the April 25, and Convoy Z (Fast) with *Javelin* departed on the 28th. Both rendezvoused on May 3. The main assault took place on May 5. Simultaneously, the light cruiser *Hermione* carried out a diversionary attack to the east and then patrolled the entrance to Diego Suarez Bay. The Fleet Air Arm also attacked the airfield and Vichy French shipping in the harbour, damaging the armed merchant cruiser *Bougainville* and sinking the submarine *Beveziers*. One Swordfish was shot down.

Following the invasion's success, *Javelin* sailed to Alexandria and joined the 14th Flotilla. In June, she was part of the escort force for Operation Vigorous, a convoy from ports in the eastern Mediterranean to Malta. The convoy was heavily attacked and eventually had to turn back, with the Australian destroyer HMAS *Nestor* bombed, damaged and taken under tow by *Javelin*. However, efforts to recover the stricken ship were abandoned and *Javelin* scuttled her with depth charges.

Javelin remained in the Mediterranean for the rest of 1942, escorting convoys, including to Malta, and carrying out shore bombardments. On November 18, she transferred to Malta, joining Force 'K' and intercepting enemy convoys to North Africa. The destroyer sank three schooners on January 8, 1943, and on

TOP LEFT: **Smoke drifts across Pantelleria during the naval and air bombardment of the island, the capture of which was a vital precursor to the Sicily invasion. The ten-day barrage coerced the surrender of its 11,000-strong garrison** OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH



TOP RIGHT: **Two ships with parts to play in *Javelin's* story: *Jupiter* (foreground) and *Kashmir*** OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

> *"Javelin had a brief life, but saw more action and more tragedy than many other ships with considerably longer careers"*

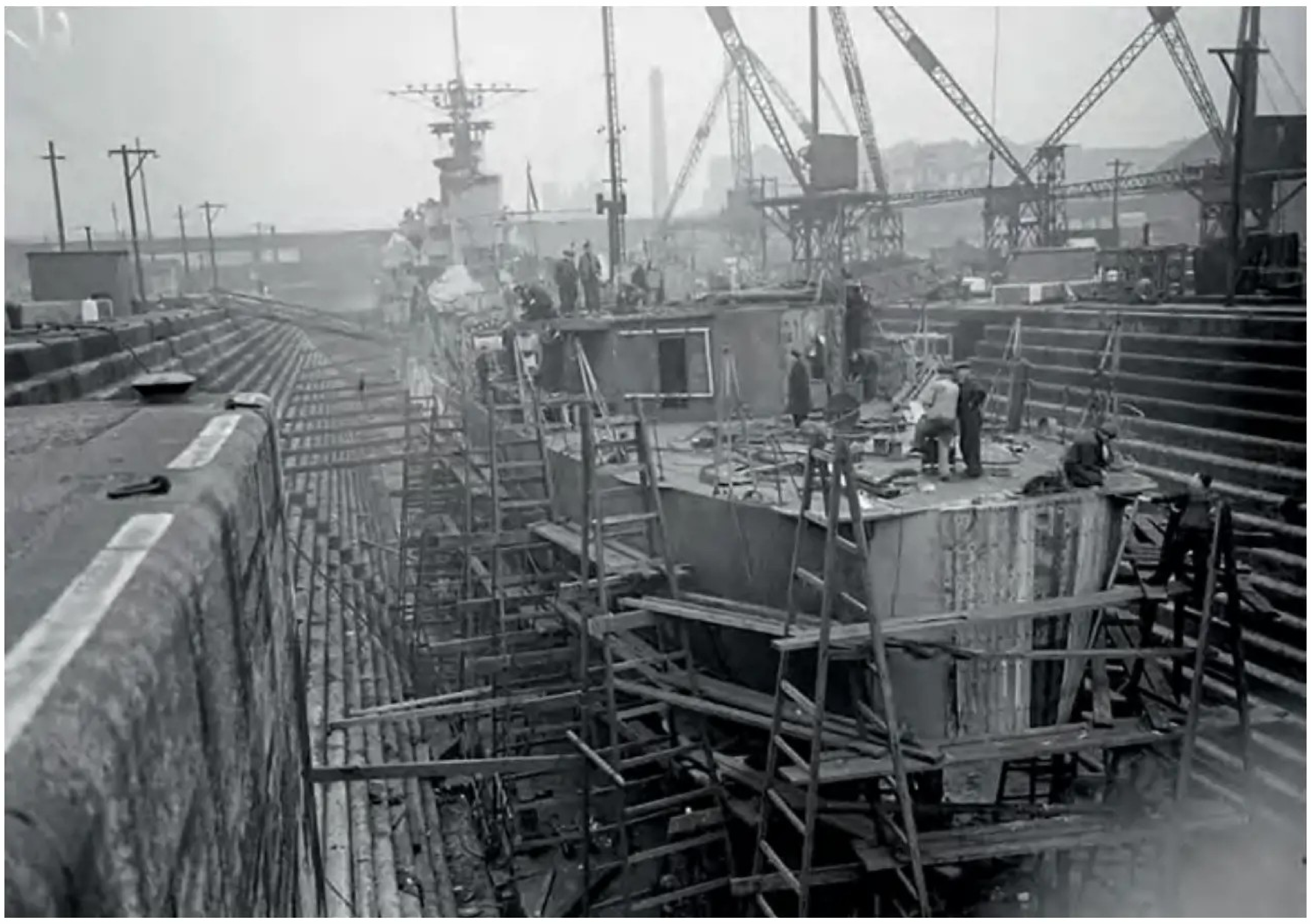
the 30th intercepted an Italian convoy off Tripoli. Working with HMS *Kelvin*, the pair sank all 11 ships – including four minesweepers. In June, *Javelin* carried out a bombardment of Pantelleria prior to the landing of British troops there in Operation Corkscrew. She was then ordered home for refit, arriving at Portsmouth on June 15.

Battle off Brittany

On completion of trials, *Javelin* joined the 10th Destroyer Flotilla of the Home Fleet and on February 10, 1944, sailed for Scapa Flow. She carried out screening duties between February and April, but in May transferred to Plymouth for support in the forthcoming Allied landings at Normandy.

In the week before the D-Day landings, the flotilla sailed patrols between St Malo and Ushant to intercept enemy surface vessels attempting to attack Channel traffic. On June 9, *Javelin* was involved in the Battle of Ushant, a significant engagement between German and Allied destroyers off the Brittany coast. The 10th Flotilla, comprising *Tartar, Ashanti, Eskimo, Javelin*, HMCS *Haida*, HMCS *Huron*, and the Polish vessels ORP *Błyskawica* and ORP *Piorun*, were sailing westward down the English Channel when they detected the German ships on radar at 0100hrs. *Tartar* launched two torpedoes at ZH1, blowing off her bow. The ship was later scuttled. *Haida* and *Huron* engaged the Z32, which was driven ashore near Île de Batz and destroyed by Beaufighters the next day – the same squadrons later caught up with other German survivors from the battle.

On July 7, *Javelin* was in another collision, this time with *Eskimo*, sustaining major damage to her stern and losing steering. Three crewmen were killed, but the ship limped into Plymouth using her main engines to steer. After temporary repairs she headed for Harland & Wolff at Belfast where her repairs took until the end of December.



BOTTOM: ***Javelin* undergoing repairs in dry dock, possibly to her stern and steering following a collision with HMS *Eskimo*, or to replace her problematic boiler tubes. Note how her rear decks have been cleared of armaments and fixtures** IWM A26283

Javelin then joined the 14th Destroyer Flotilla in the Mediterranean, arriving on February 19, 1945. However, she experienced problems with her boiler tubes and only rejoined the flotilla on May 8 – the day the war in Europe ended.

Javelin endured a tough war and had somehow survived. She continued service in the Mediterranean Fleet until April 1946, combining exercises with patrols off Palestine. There was to be one more notable event, which came in September 1946 when off Rhodes. Eight petty officers, 17 able seamen and a leading seaman were charged with mutiny and wilful disobedience when they refused to fall in for work.

The destroyer sailed for home from Malta on May 9, 1946, to pay off into the reserve. She was placed on the disposal list in October 1948 and subsequently used for ship target trials before being sold for scrapping. She arrived at Troon, Scotland, for breaking up on June 11, 1949.

HMS *Javelin* had a brief life – barely seven years of service – but she saw more action and more tragedy than many other fighting ships with considerably longer naval careers. BW

MUSEUM of the BATTLE of the BULGE LA ROCHE in the BELGIAN ARDENNES

This museum with an astonishing collection on 3 levels and 1500 square meters – soon to cover 4 levels and 2000 sq.m. was started soon after the war by Michel BOUILLON and has now been taken over by his son Gilles who continues developping it.

It's the only museum in the Bulge that has a British section. As La Roche was liberated by British troops on 11 January 1945, numerous British veterans have returned and donated artefacts and uniforms such as, amongst others, the combat jacket of Lieutenant-Colonel Cathaert, commander of the 7th Battalion Black-Watch of the 51st Highland Division who participated in the liberation of La Roche. The jacket was offered to the museum on the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge by the Headquarter of the Black-Watch regiment in Perth (Scotland).

- The **Enigma** decoding machine and various British vehicles are also exhibited.
- The **gun room** exhibits some 90 rifles, pistols and revolvers
- The **veterans room** assembles the donations by veterans of the Battle of the Bulge
- The **wall maps** show the successive stages of the Battle of the Bulge
- The **video** presents archive footage of the liberation of La Roche in January 1945

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Apache at War

Flying the World's Deadliest Attack Helicopter in Combat

By Steve Jones

If you know your recent Anglo-Afghanistan history and want to place *Apache at War* into context, here goes: In 2006, Captain Steve Jones flew an Apache attack helicopter while Major Mark Hammond DFC flew a Chinook into Helmand Province's Musa Qala to rescue badly wounded soldiers in their beleaguered base when they were besieged by Taliban insurgents. However, after the first attempt was aborted, the plan was altered. Pairs of Apaches shot a path through the Taliban fighters, clearing the way for Hammond's Chinook. It's a very famous story that Hammond has already recounted in his justifiably lauded memoir, *Immediate Danger* and *Apache at War* can be seen as an invaluable companion piece, offering a new perspective on the event, but there is a lot more to the book besides that.

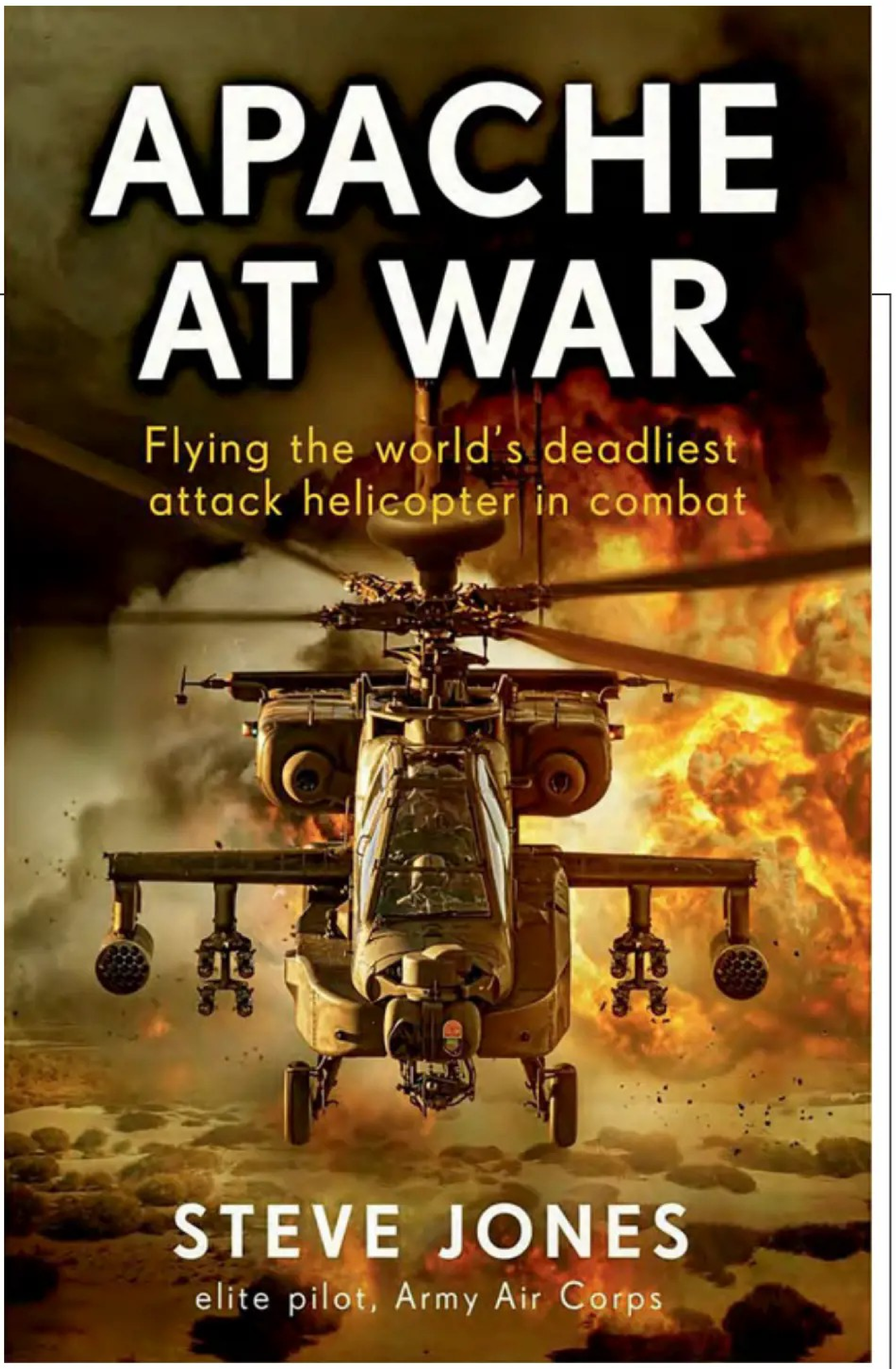
As an example, do you recall when Prince Harry returned from his secret first tour of Afghanistan and requested to fly Apaches with the Army Air Corps? Steve Jones was his instructor. In fact, Jones had been in the first cohort of helicopter pilots trained on the Apache when it was introduced to British Army service in 2004, and it is fair to say that he took every opportunity that the armed forces offer in terms of adventurous courses, unusual deployments and career advancement – a man who has been everywhere and seen everything. Even flying with royalty was not a one off.

Jones, who served in the British Army for 27 years and later in his career received the AFC following another daring rescue mission supported by his Apache gunship, has put considerable effort into this book, producing a frank and rather honest account.

Indeed, this is a great British Army memoir. While the author gives the impression of frustration with political correctness today, it is not distracting. It is rare to find a personal account that will surely be relatable in some way to an enormous number of serving or veteran personnel – from the humour and workplace spirit to the trauma and grief associated with killing and being killed in war.

Possibly the finest writing occurs when Jones recounts the shocking impact felt by all Army Air Corps pilots (many of which, like Jones, were in the middle of arduous tours in Afghanistan and facing danger everyday) when a training helicopter crashed back in England. The loss of the friends and colleagues, the fact that it was an accident and not combat-related, combined with the continual stress of already being deployed on operational tour combined to form a perfect storm.

However, for those wishing to buy *Apache at War* because they want to read about helicopters in combat, don't worry, almost half of the book is dedicated to combat tours in Afghanistan. These are unapologetically honest about the danger, thrills and confusion of Helmand Province.


APACHE AT WAR
Flying the world's deadliest attack helicopter in combat
STEVE JONES
elite pilot, Army Air Corps

If the tales of British helicopters pounding through the Afghan skies fill you with unease, as British involvement in that campaign remains controversial, there are also insightful chapters dedicated to learning to fly. Unlike normal aircraft, helicopters are not so graceful in the air, being unable to glide for example. Helicopter pilots write about learning to fly with a wry humour that is perhaps lacking from fast jet top guns. A favourite book of mine is Robert Mason's memoir, *Chickenhawk*, of being a Huey pilot in the US military during their defeat in Vietnam, to which *Apache at War* can be favourably compared. Is there anything better than reading about suave helicopter instructors using age and wisdom to guide roaring young pilots through their training? Jones captures it all.

Ultimately, this fast-paced memoir contains more action and adventure than most and offers another insightful viewpoint of the British campaign experience in Afghanistan. A better understanding of the circumstances of our deployments and withdrawal from Afghanistan is valuable because understanding that conflict will aid us to make changes for the next task that the armed forces are called on to confront.

Reviewed by Toby Clark

Publisher: *John Blake/Bonnier*
Web: *bonnierbooks.co.uk*
ISBN: *978-1-78946-720-8*
All formats: *374 Pages*

RRP: *£22 (Hardback), £9.99 (softback), £3.99 (eBook)*
Illustrations: *Yes*
References/notes: *No*
Appendices: *No*

Cinderella Rifles

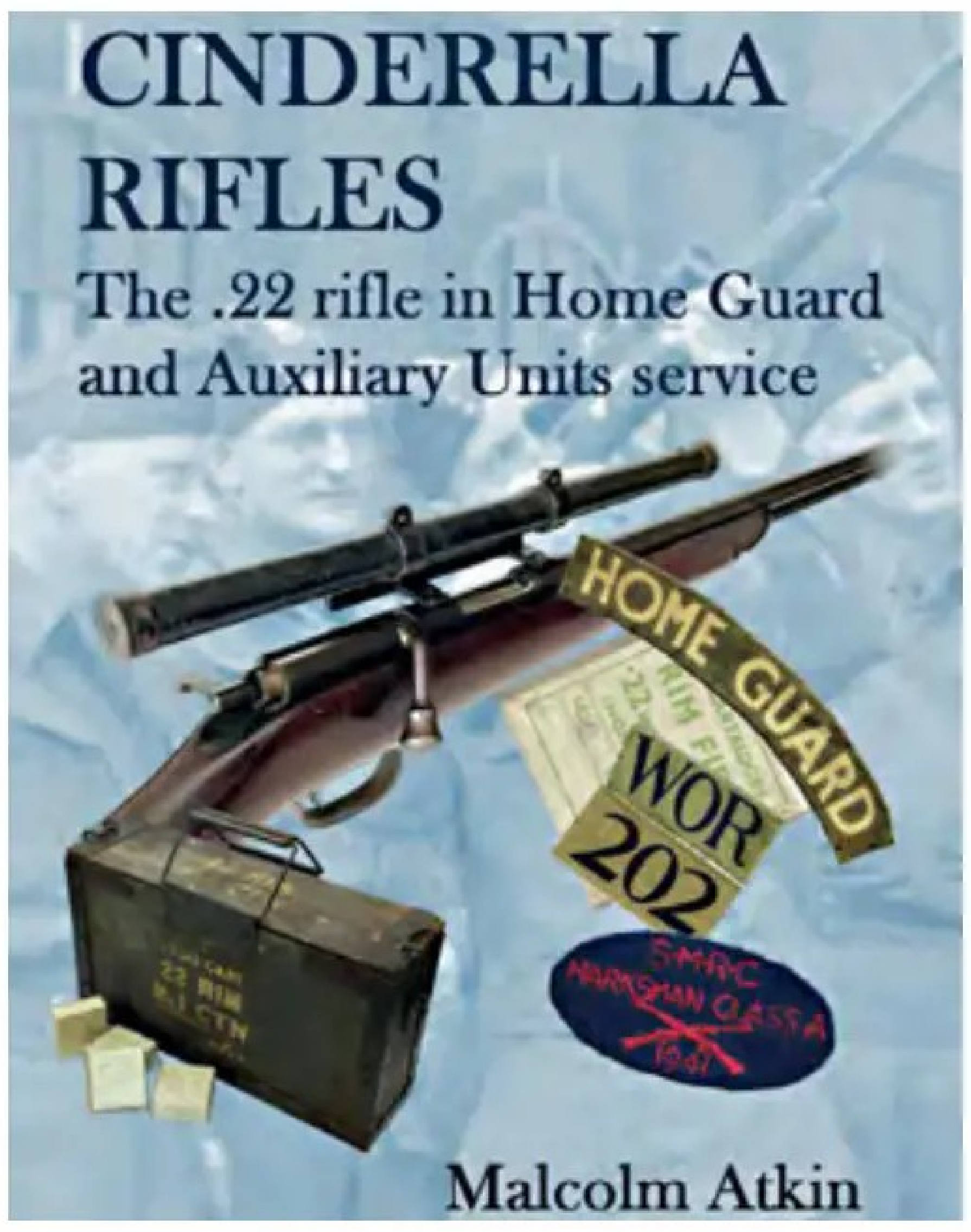
The .22 rifle in Home Guard and Auxiliary Units service

The low recoil .22LR is the most popular calibre on the planet. Ideal for recreational shooting and some hunting, it is a cheap rimfire cartridge with a reputation for, if I'm honest, being a little wimpy.

However, that's rather unfair; various .22 weapons have been – and continue to be – used for specialist and martial functions.

Enter Malcolm Atkin's new book, which highlights the use of .22 rifles within the Home Guard. The book's title comes from a comment by Bisley shooting champion A Banks, who in 1941 wrote that .22 rifles were the "Cinderellas" of military service – i.e., overlooked, underappreciated and underutilised. This is the first detailed study of .22 rifles in Home Guard and Auxiliary Unit service. Already an established calibre, '.22s' were ill-suited for general combat but did retain essential utility. Many were owned by members of the LDV/Home Guard, meaning those first starting guard duty may well have had something more versatile than a broom handle to shoulder.

The .22 was quickly relegated to training, but, more than just a tool to hone marksmanship, the rifles and their associated activity became an important social focus for the Home Guard. However, there was a struggle to get the calibre recognised by the War Office as viable, and sourcing ammunition was a bugbear. As the war progressed, .22 rifles seem to have been adopted by the Auxiliary Units, ostensibly as short-range sniper rifles – yet there is a mystery to solve as the semi-automatic Winchester Model 74, popularly said to have been issued, appears to never officially have been.



A charming little volume about charming little weapons.

Reviewed by John Ash

Author: Malcolm Atkin
Publisher: MAMR Books (mwatkin.com)
ISBN: 978-1-06839-192-7
All formats: 99 pages
RRP: £9.99
Available from Amazon and Paul Meekings Books

The Belgian RAF pilot who defied the Gestapo

The fearless Baron de Selys Longchamps

Originally published in Belgium in 2023, this well written biography recounts the story of the exiled Belgian RAF pilot Flight Lieutenant Baron Jean de Selys Longchamps. Scion of an aristocratic family, the account traces his early life before he enlisted in the Belgian Army in 1933, joining a cavalry regiment, and his brief period of action in 1940.

Escaping from his homeland after many adventures, he joined the RAF and trained as a pilot, eventually being posted to 609 Squadron and flying Spitfires. In early 1942 Longchamps converted to Typhoons and continued flying offensive operations over the continent. His most famous exploit was when he made an unauthorised – but morale-boosting – strafing attack on the HQ of the dreaded Gestapo in Brussels on January 20, 1943.

Thanks to access to family papers, his life, tour in 609 Squadron and the background and detail of his audacious attack, are recounted in great and fascinating detail. Sadly, Longchamps was killed later in 1943, but this is a worthy account to honour his life and the service of the RAF's exiled Belgian fighter pilots.

Reviewed by Andrew Thomas

Author: Marc Audrit
Publisher: Air World/Pen & Sword (pen-and-sword.co.uk)
ISBN: 978-1-03611-977-5
Hardback & eBook: 304 pages
RRP: £29.99 (18.99 eBook)

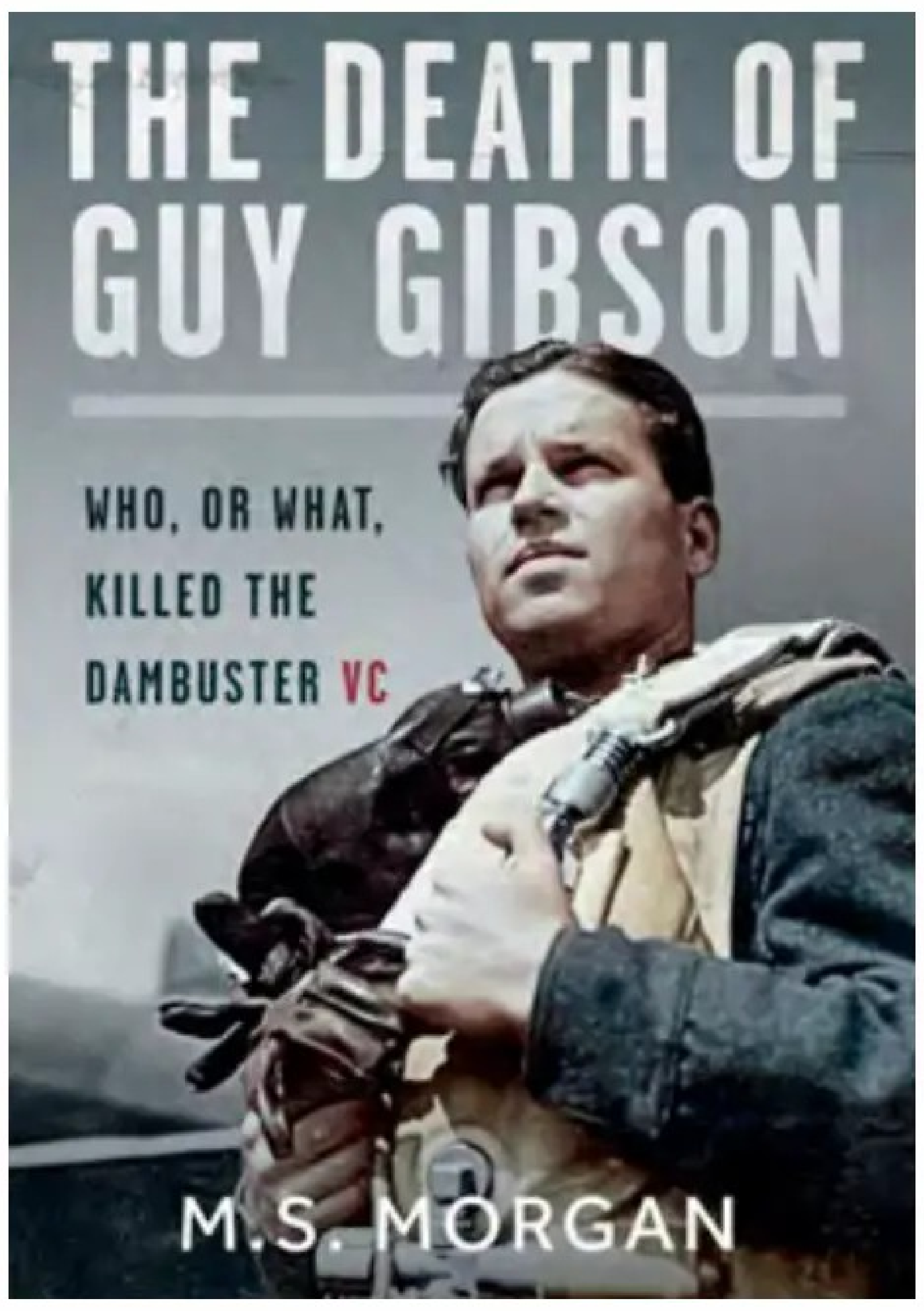
THE
BELGIAN
RAF PILOT
WHO DEFIED
THE GESTAPO
THE FEARLESS BARON DE SELYS LONGCHAMPS
MARC AUDRIT

The Death of Guy Gibson

Who, or What, Killed the Dambuster VC

At 1030hrs on September 19, 1944, Mosquito B Mk.XX serial KB627 slammed into the ground near Steenbergen, in the Netherlands. The cause of the crash has been the subject of speculation ever since, as its pilot was Wing Commander Guy Gibson VC, DSO & Bar, DFC & Bar – who led the Dambuster Raid, and completed more than 170 operational sorties.

Like the disappearance of Glenn Miller, or Hess' curious flight to Britain, Gibson's sudden loss is one of the great mysteries of World War Two; how could it have been that the aircraft flown by one of the RAF's most experienced airmen fell from the sky?



Numerous works have attempted to explain Gibson's death, and M S Morgan reignites the debate with thorough interrogation of the evidence. Using skills developed across 30 years as a senior police detective, Morgan outlines Gibson's career before detailing the many theories surrounding his demise.

Pilot or mechanical error, German ground fire, prowling Luftwaffe night-fighters and the generally accepted friendly fire are all deliberated, enabling Morgan to offer his judgement, in the process developing his own weighted conclusions.

This is a compelling dive into the circumstances of the loss of one of World War Two's greatest airmen.

Reviewed by Tom Baker

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Publisher: Air World/Pen & Sword
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Hardback & eBook: 256 Pages
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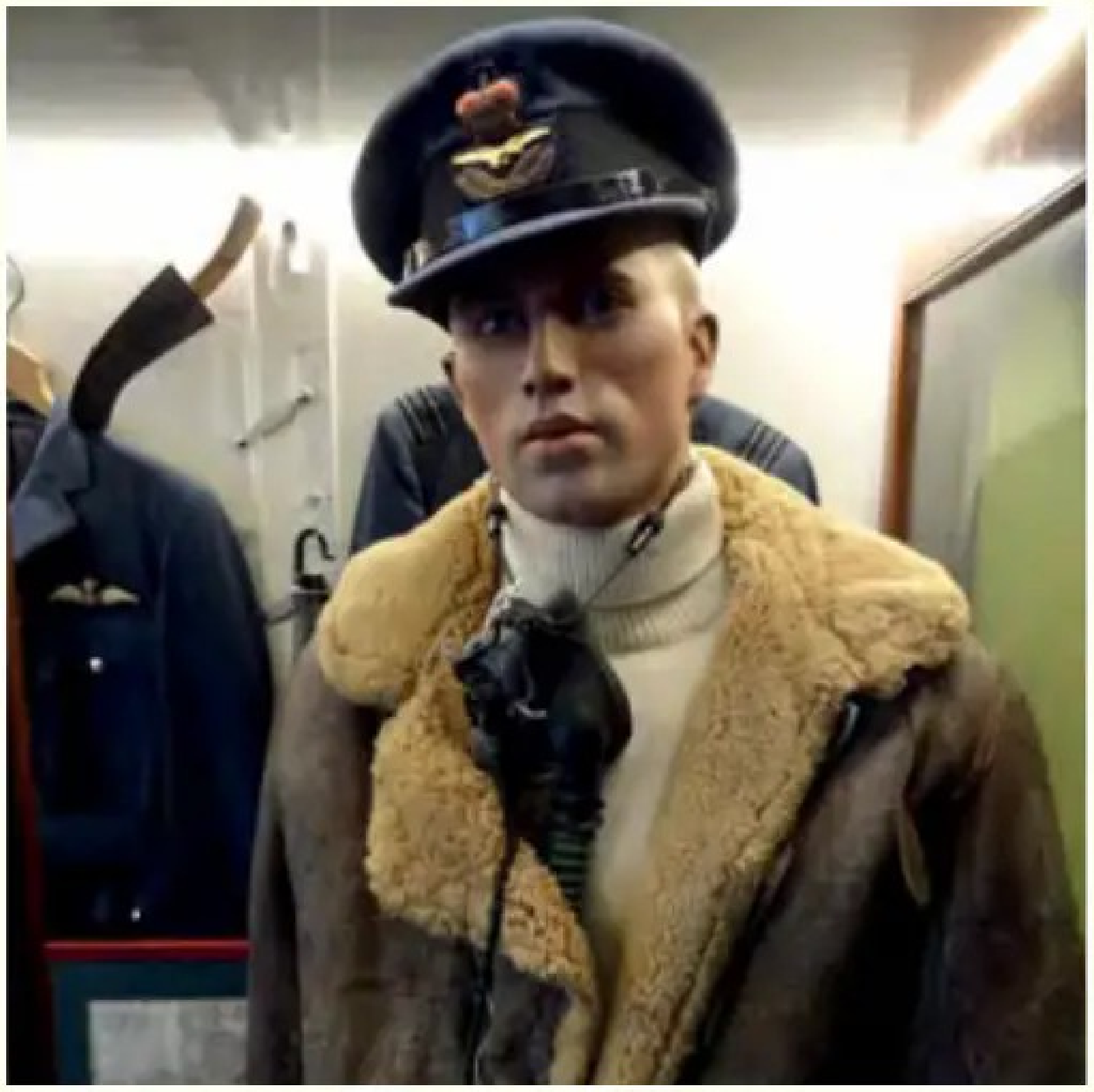

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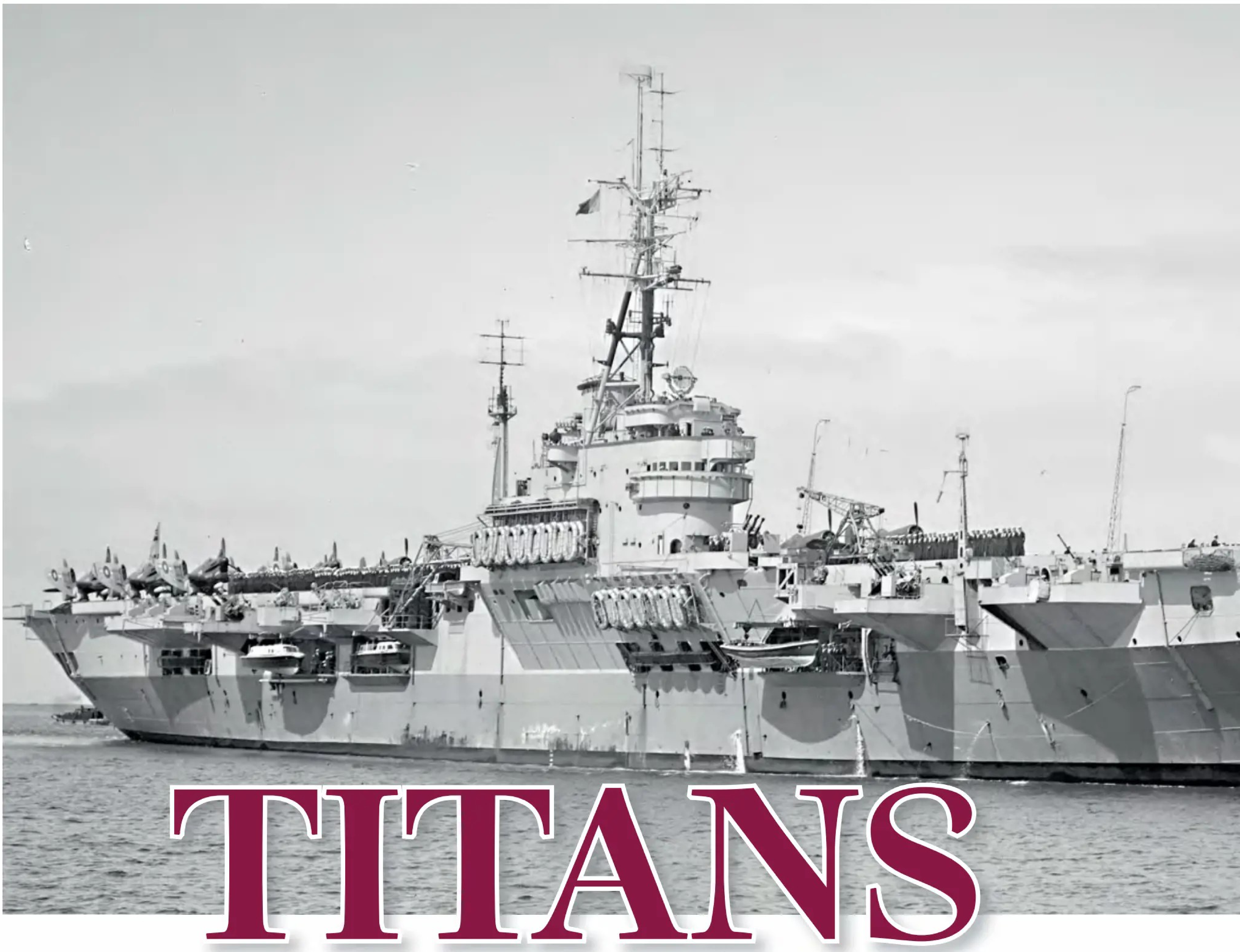


TITANS OF THE SEA

In 1942, Britain embraced an ambitious shipbuilding programme, laying down 16 aircraft carriers in just 17 months. Few expected these vessels – the ultimate in wartime exigency – would sail until 2001. **John Ash** profiles the Colossus- and Majestic-class carriers

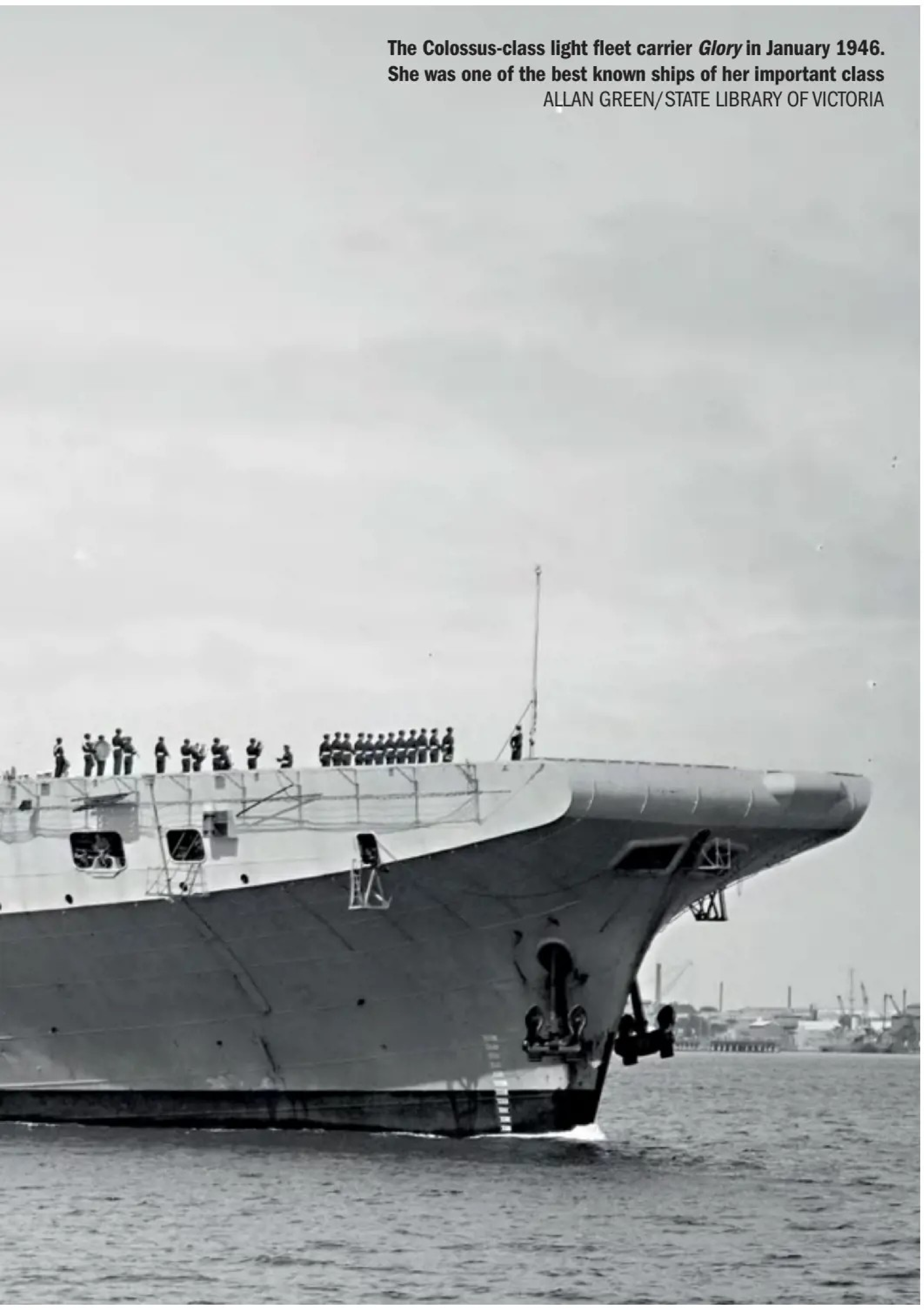
Think of a post-war aircraft carrier – is it an American one?

The United States has long been a frontrunner in carrier construction. It's wartime Essex- and Midway-classes served into the 1990s, the Forrestal-class introduced the world to supercarriers, and in 1961 came *Enterprise*, the first nuclear-powered carrier. The modern aircraft carrier ranks among the most powerful warfighting assets. They are versatile, potent reminders that soft power has a tough alternative. Other nations have carriers – the British and French have both put supercarriers to sea – but America's flagship vessels hit different. USN carrier strength is even enshrined in law: 10 US Code §8062 stating "the naval combat forces of the Navy shall include not less than 11 operational aircraft carriers".

However, during the Cold War, a series of British disposable carriers forged comparable significance. Given unprecedented construction priority and with 16 hulls laid down at the height of wartime, the resultant Colossus- and Majestic-classes served no fewer than eight navies and represented Britain's most ambitious capital ship programme since the dreadnought race.

Design priority

The 1942 Design Light Fleet Carrier programme introduced a universal design to bridge the gap between existing aircraft carrier designs, and, with war raging, more flight decks were desperately needed. Several Royal Navy



The Colossus-class light fleet carrier *Glory* in January 1946. She was one of the best known ships of her important class
ALLAN GREEN/STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA

fleet carriers were outdated pre-war constructs and three had been lost by April 1942; diminutive *Hermes* that April, *Glorious* in June 1940 and *Courageous* became the first British warship sunk in World War Two on September 17, 1939. Additionally, the large, nearly new *Ark Royal* was lost in November 1941.

Four Illustrious-class fleet carriers were in service by October 1941. Notable for their armoured flight decks, these resilient ships survived attacks that any other carrier would not. However, they were expensive and time-consuming to build and sacrificed the size of their air groups for protection. Two additional armoured carriers, the larger, faster Implacable-class, would not be complete until mid-1944.

Conversely, merchant aircraft carriers had to retain cargo-carrying capability, and while escort carriers were typically about half the length and a third the displacement of a fleet carrier, and therefore cheap and quick to build, they were vulnerable and slow. While ideal for convoy duties, they struggled with fleet work.

The trick was to devise a new style of carrier with the qualities of both fleet and escort types to supplement the carrier fleet – and quickly. These ships had to be simple builds but with suitable speed and a large enough air group for fleet work.

A colossal undertaking

In mid-1941, the Director of Naval Construction, naval architect Sir Stanley Goodall, posited three solutions: the conversion of aging cruisers; the use of more merchant/liner conversions; and a purpose-built fleet carrier. Goodall recommended the latter, as building new ships would avoid taking much-needed cruisers or transports out of service.

By January 1942 the design work (by Vickers-Armstrong) had progressed. First designated Intermediate Aircraft Carriers, the ships were reclassified as Light Fleet Carriers. At full load they were to displace 18,000-tonnes and measure 695ft long. Built to merchant, rather than military, standard, they could be built in more shipyards – vital, as yard capacity was finite with many slipways taken up by in-build/refit vessels such as the battleship *Vanguard*.

The Light Fleets were scaled down versions of the Illustrious-class, displacing 5,000 tonnes less and 45ft shorter, and featuring a hurricane bow, island with three-stage bridge, and a tripod mainmast. They were also slower than the 31kts forebears, with geared turbines and four 3-drum boilers producing just a third of the total shaft-horsepower. Nevertheless, the planned 25kts speed was enough and the ships also had a 12,000nmi range – 20% greater than the Illustrious-class. Complement, including air crew, ranged between 1,000-1,300 men.

The new carriers were to be disposable with at most three years of hard wartime steaming ahead of them. They were entirely unarmoured, but did feature a greater number of hull subdivisions, producing

Rikugun-Taishō (General) Hitoshi Imamura signs the official document for the surrender of Japanese ground forces in New Britain, New Ireland, the Solomons and New Guinea on the deck of *Glory* at Rabaul on September 6, 1945. Kaigun-taishō (Admiral) Jinichi Kusaka signed the treaty surrendering Japanese naval forces in the region. Lieutenant-General Vernon Sturdee, GOC First Australian Army, signed on behalf of the Allies
OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

Colossus, her deck filled with Seafires and Barracudas, leaving Malta in 1945 TOPFOTO

> *"Given unprecedented priority and with 16 hulls laid down at the height of wartime, the Colossus- and Majestic-classes represented Britain's most ambitious capital ship programme since the dreadnought race"*

impressive redundant buoyancy so that in the event a substantial hit left a large hole, odds were the ships would remain afloat.

The vessels also omitted a battery of QF 4.5in DP guns – typically mounted on British carriers until the 1970s – and planned pair of QF 4in DP guns were deleted in favour of extending the flight deck. To compensate for the lack of a dual-purpose battery and absent armour, the ships' formidable close-in weapons suite comprised six quad-barrel QF 2-pounder 'Pom-Pom' guns and 32 20mm Oerlikon cannon. Later, 40mm Bofors mounts replaced the Oerlikons on a one-to-one basis – though the Pom-Pom lingered due to its high fire rate, availability and effectiveness against kamikazes. Gyroscopic Mk.IV Fire Directors and Type 282 radars controlled the anti-aircraft guns.

Being unarmoured, lightly built, and omitting a main battery, the weight and space saved enabled the ships to accommodate a larger, tall hanger deck and a longer flight deck (690ft) than otherwise may have been possible. Two lifts and a single catapult were installed, while the 445ft by 52ft hangar and its impressive 17½ft clearance enabled aircraft to be carried that the armoured carriers could not. The ships could operate up to 52 aircraft (but usually took on 40-48), against the 36 embarked by the previous design (excluding the modified *Indomitable* and its larger air group).

In February 1942, the Light Fleet design was approved, and the Admiralty ordered no fewer than 16 vessels. Named the Colossus-class, construction began in March. Built in eight yards, all had been laid down by November 1943 and it was expected each ship would take 27 months to complete. *Colossus* and *Glory* were the first, built by Vickers-Armstong and Harland & Wolff and launched in September and November 1943. *Ocean*, built by Stephen & Sons, was the first to launch in July 1943 but *Colossus* was the first to commission, joining the fleet in December 1944.

Change of plan

At end of World War Two, *Colossus*, *Vengeance*, *Venerable*, *Glory*, *Warrior*, and *Ocean* had commissioned but by the time the first four had been sent to the Far East, Japan had surrendered. *Theseus* and *Triumph* rounded out the class, completed by mid-1946. That accounts for eight vessels, as two considerations altered Admiralty plans.

Two ships were completed to take on mechanically troubled aircraft from other carriers. The concept had been established by HMS *Unicorn*, a maintenance carrier entering service in 1943. She launched air operations during the Salerno invasion but transferred to the Eastern Fleet and later the British Pacific Fleet to support carriers there. *Unicorn*, essentially a floating workshop, was a prized asset in the Far East where light repairs and pre-planned flying hours-based maintenance to carrier aircraft – given the distances otherwise involved – were quickened by her presence. Two Colossus-class ships were so-modified, *Pioneer* (commissioned February 1945) and *Perseus*

Legendary aviator Eric 'Winkle' Brown completed the first jet landings and take-offs on carriers in a Sea Vampire from *Glory* CROWN COPYRIGHT

Seafire F Mk.47s of 800 NAS and Firefly FR.1s of 827 NAS on *Triumph* during the Korean War. The carrier operated off Korea until September 1950, when she was replaced on station by *Theseus*, which carried the Sea Fury GETTY

Royal Marines of 45 Commando prepare to board *Theseus's* Whirlwind helicopters during the Suez Crisis ahead of... WORLD HISTORY ARCHIVE/TOPFOTO

(October 1945). Unlike *Unicorn*, neither had the facilities to operate air groups.

All three ships suffered to the reduced demands of the post-war era. *Unicorn* served until 1946 but was recommissioned in 1949 for a further four years, while *Pioneer* – sent to the Far East in March 1945 – spent months in Hong Kong utilising her workshops to restore civil infrastructure. In early 1946 she went into reserve and remained there until scrapping in 1954. *Perseus* went to the Far East until entering reserve in 1946. In 1954 she hosted trails for the anti-submarine variant of the Whirlwind helicopter, and then went drydock for conversion to a submarine depot ship. This was cancelled in the 1957 Defence White Paper and *Perseus* was soon set for scrap.

The remaining six ships were an attempt at futureproofing. Even within the anticipated short life cycle of the Colossus-class, it was noted that the pace of carrier aircraft development had to be catered for. Known as the Majestic-class, these vessels incorporated strengthened catapults, arrestor gear and deck lifts as well as reinforced flight decks to accommodate faster, heavier aircraft. Equally rapid advances in radar, fire control and anti-aircraft armaments had been considered, and the ships received a unified armament of 30 40mm Bofors cannon in six twin and 18 single mounts.

All Majestics – *Majestic, Terrible, Magnificent, Hercules, Leviathan* and *Powerful* – were laid down before the end of the war, and all but *Leviathan* launched, but their construction was suspended. None entered British service, instead, with the looming expiration of the well-worn Illustrious-class and the interim Colossus-class, a final iteration of the 1942 design was pursued, which became the Centaur-class – larger 27,000-tonne carriers – of which four entered service from 1953.

Light Fleet, heavy strike

The striking power of the Colossus-class air groups meant they packed a weightier punch than their larger predecessors. The large hanger and deck parking enabled a typical air group of 24 Barracuda torpedo/dive bombers and 24 Seafire fighters to be embarked, although this ratio would vary. Alternatively, a night-fighting group comprising 32 radar-equipped Fireflys or Hellcats could be embarked.

The two-seat Firefly reconnaissance fighter was sturdy, long-ranged and became a mainstay, as it was capable of carrying 16 RP-3 rockets or 2,000lb of bombs. The sole advantage offered by the slower Barracuda – the Fleet Air Arm's first all-metal aircraft – was that it could carry the AN-Mk.I 1600lb bomb or a large torpedo. However, with greater numbers of the Tarpon/Avenger available, these and the Firefly displaced the Barracuda. Post-war, the Seafires were supplanted by the Sea Fury, and mixed Sea Fury/Firefly air groups became common.

Other aircraft were embarked including Hellcats, Corsairs, and post-war Sea Hornet twin-engine fighters, Sea Vampire jets and Whirlwind and Sycamore helicopters. The ships supported various British operations including the liberation of Hong Kong, post-war actions in Palestine and during the Corfu Channel Incident. The versatile air groups were useful during the Korean War, which saw *Triumph, Theseus, Glory, Ocean* and the Majestic-class *Sydney* rotate on station throughout the three-year conflict. It was deemed more cost effective to maintain a sustained Light Fleet deployment than to use armoured carriers, but it also generated wear – after all, the vessels were disposable.

Triumph, operating with the USS *Valley Forge*, launched the first carrier strikes of the Korean War on July 3, 1950, and later supported the Inchon landings. In August 1952, one of *Ocean*'s Sea Furys shot down a MiG-15. *Theseus* completed ten war patrols. Meanwhile, *Warrior* moved aircraft and stores to support the other ships, and later helped enforce the post-armistice ceasefire.

A landmark moment came during the 1956 Suez Crisis. The Royal Navy's fixed-wing power was provided by *Albion, Bulwark* and *Eagle* – Centaur- and Audacious-class carriers – but *Ocean* and *Theseus* had an important role. The invasion was spearheaded by an airborne drop by the Parachute Regiment, and by the first helicopter-borne amphibious assault. The pair embarked 45 Commando and flew it to secure key positions via helicopter, delivering 425 Royal Marines and 25 tonnes of equipment in 90 minutes, birthing the amphibious assault ship.

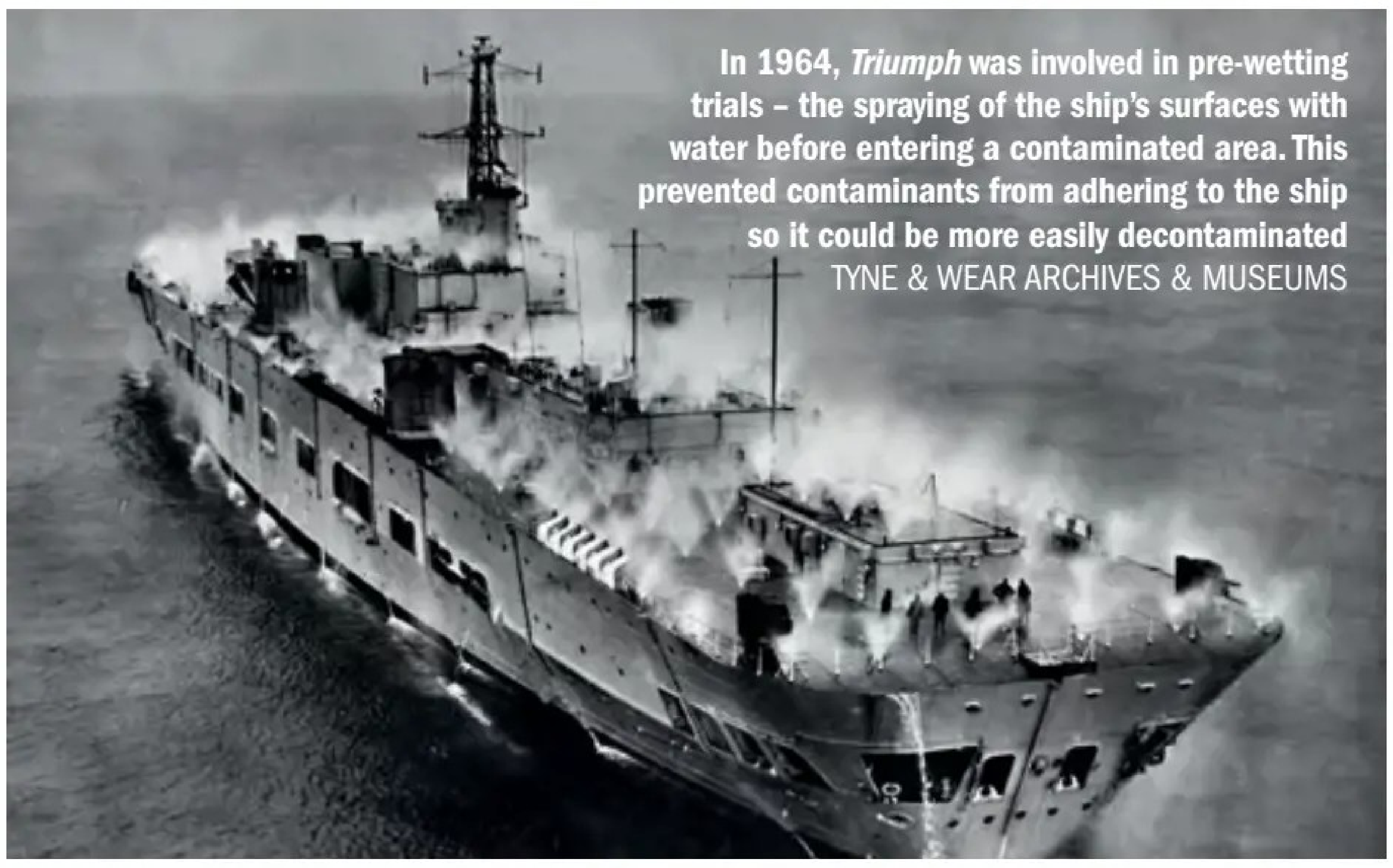
The world's carriers

Towards the end of the decade, the Royal Navy shed its Colossus-class carriers, scrapping the maintenance carriers and with *Glory, Theseus* and *Ocean* all paid off by 1960. *Triumph* enjoyed a lengthier career, functioning as a training ship after Korea and making a 'goodwill' visit to Leningrad in 1955.

The following year she entered a nine-year refit that converted her into a heavy repair ship, after which she became a core component of the fleet. In 1975, she entered the reserve, and was scrapped in 1981, making her the longest-serving Light Fleet in British service. Attempts were made to buy the vessel back during the 1982 Falklands Conflict but work to scrap her had already begun.

The remaining ships had careers overseas. *Colossus* was loaned to the French as *Arromanches* and later purchased outright. She flew

...the first helicopter-borne amphibious assault on November 6, 1956, when *Glory* and *Theseus* deployed the unit and its equipment by air in just 90 minutes TOPFOTO



In 1964, *Triumph* was involved in pre-wetting trials – the spraying of the ship's surfaces with water before entering a contaminated area. This prevented contaminants from adhering to the ship so it could be more easily decontaminated
TYNE & WEAR ARCHIVES & MUSEUMS

sorties on four deployments to Indochina between 1948-54, primarily operating Hellcats and Corsairs – the latter flying from her to attack Egyptian positions during the Suez Crisis. A refit in the late 1950s introduced an angled flight deck, after which the carrier was used as a training ship and then as an anti-submarine vessel with Alizé submarine hunters. Replaced in 1961, she rounded off her career as a helicopter carrier until retired in 1971.

Warrior went to the Royal Canadian Navy in 1946, embarking Seafires and Fireflys, and was returned to the British in 1948 and became a trials vessel. After Korea, she received an extensive refit, receiving an optical landing system, Type 961 CCA radar and angled flight deck. *Warrior* served as a headquarters ship during Britain's Grapple H-bomb tests and evacuated more than 3,200 refugees from North Vietnam. Offered for sale in 1958, her buyer was Argentina, which named her *Independencia*. The Argentines installed several upgrades but in doing so increased her displacement to 20,000-tonnes and reduced her speed by 2kts. Her 24-strong air group comprised Corsairs, Texans and Trackers. Attempts to operate Panther and Cougar jets from her were successful but deemed impractical as the ship's BH-3 hydraulic catapult was not powerful enough to launch them.

Independencia was scrapped in 1971, and her replacement was *Venerable*, which had been sold to the Netherlands as *Karel Doorman* and had received a substantial refit in the mid-1950s that installed an angled flight deck, steam catapult, and changes to her island and systems. Her air Dutch group usually comprised 22 aircraft, including Sea Hawk jets and Avengers. Later, Tracker submarine hunters and Chicksaw helicopters joined the ship. She saw out her Dutch career as an anti-submarine carrier until a fire in 1968 saw her retired. Repaired, she was sold to Argentina as *Veinticinco de Mayo*. She embarked Skyhawk multi-role fighters and received several small refits until 1981, the last of which adapted the ship for the Super Etendard strike fighter. However, the ship struggled to launch them, so sortied to the Falklands in 1982 carrying Skyhawks. The carrier posed a significant threat to the British, but the sinking of the cruiser *Belgrano* cowed the Argentine Navy into port and *Veinticinco de Mayo* played no real part in the conflict. By 1988, she was inoperable, and she was scrapped in 2000.

Finally, *Vengeance* was loaned to the Australians between 1952-55 and sold to Brazil in 1956 as the *Minas Gerais* and en route received an extensive Dutch refit similar to *Karel Doorman*. She served as an anti-submarine carrier for much of her career, only receiving Skyhawks in 1999. Decommissioned in 2001, she was at the time the oldest active carrier in the world. Eventually scrapped, attempts were made to return her to Britain as a museum ship, and, incredibly, to sell her on eBay. Both failed.

Modern majesty

Meanwhile, the six Majestics lingered, half-built, on British slipways. Work on each picked up when foreign buyers were sourced, and only the unsold *Leviathan* was scrapped before completion – although her boilers replaced those on *Venerable*. A plus of the delayed construction was that each Majestic-class vessel received the most modern fit available, incorporating key advances such as angled flight decks, steam catapults and optical landing systems.

Majestic and *Terrible* went to Australia as *Melbourne* and *Sydney*. Commissioned in 1948, *Sydney* flew sorties in Korea, becoming the first Commonwealth fleet carrier to launch strike operations. After a stint in reserve, she became a fast transport and during the Vietnam War gained the nickname 'Vung Tau Ferry'. Retired in 1973, she was scrapped two years later. *Melbourne* served with the Australians from 1955 until 1982 and had only peripheral roles in the Indonesian Confrontation and in Vietnam. Her air group peaked at 27 aircraft and included Sycamore helicopters and 16 Gannet anti-submarine/bomber aircraft. Significantly, between 1956-57, she operated Sea Venoms which on arrival were the only all-weather, radar-equipped fighter-bombers in the southern hemisphere. Her air group was later replaced by a rotary-heavy wing comprising Wessex and Sea King helicopters, Trackers and a complement of Skyhawks.

Decommissioned in May 1982, proponents of counterfactual history have pondered *Melbourne's* potential in the unlikely event she was loaned, sold or sent to support the British in the Falklands. The extra flight deck, hangar and her helicopters would have been valuable, but her small number of Skyhawks – which were air defence variants – would have been of limited value. However, she could have operated Harriers even without a ski jump.

Two Majestics went to Canada, *Magnificent* –

Landing craft move up to *Sydney* at Vung Tau to take off the 1st Battalion, RAR, and its vehicles, June 8, 1965
STUART MACGLADRIE/FAIRFAX/GETTY

The Dutch completed substantial refits both on the Majestic-class *Karel Doorman* (shown) and Brazil's Colossus-class *Minas Gerais* (formerly *Vengeance*) KONINKLIJKE MARINE

The Argentine carrier *Veinticinco de Mayo* began life as *Venerable* and first served with the Dutch as *Karel Doorman* VALT TECK

nicknamed 'Maggie' – and *Powerful,* which became *Bonaventure*. Serving between 1948-57, Maggie embarked Sea Furys, Fireflys and Avengers as well as Chicksaws. In March 1949 she was involved in a short 'mutiny' and in 1953 was at the fleet review for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, contributing 16 aircraft to the fly past. Post-Suez, *Magnificent* transported 400 Canadian troops, light aircraft and vehicles to Egypt as part of a UN peacekeeping force. She retired the next year and was scrapped in 1965.

Bonaventure was commissioned in 1957 and carried Banshee jet fighters, Trackers and Sea King helicopters. During the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, she took the place of US Navy ships in the North Atlantic, enabling American vessels to focus on the blockade of the island. *Bonaventure* was decommissioned in 1970 and scrapped the following year.

The busiest Majestic was *Hercules,* sold to India as *Vikrant* and commissioned in 1961. India's first aircraft carrier, she served until 1997, operating Sea Hawks, Sea Kings, Chetaks and Alizés. In December 1961 she supported the Invasion/Liberation of Goa, when India regained Goa, Anjidiv, Daman and Diu and ended 451 years of Portuguese rule over the exclaves, but did not launch strikes. In 1965, she was in drydock so missed the Second Indo-Pakistani War. However,

1942 DESIGN LIGHT FLEETS VS CONTEMPORARY FLEET/LARGE ESCORT CARRIER CLASSES

	COLOSSUS	MAJESTIC	ILLUSTRIOUS	COMMENCEMENT BAY	SAIPAN	ESSEX	TAIYŌ	UNRYŪ
Country:	Britain	Britain	Britain	United States	United States	United States	Japan	Japan
In service:	1944-2001	1948-97	1940-68	1944-57	1946-70	1942-91	1941-44	1944-45
Displacement (full load):	18,000 tonnes	19,500 tonnes	28,500 tonnes	24,000 tonnes	19,000 tonnes	36,400 tonnes	20,000 tonnes	20,500 tonnes
Length:	695ft (212m)	695ft	740ft (225.5m)	525ft (160m)	665ft (202m)	888ft (271m)	591ft (180m)	746ft (227m)
Beam:	80ft (24m)	80ft	96ft (29.5m)	75ft (23m)	77ft (23.5m)	93ft (28m)	74ft (22.5m)	72ft (22m)
Propulsion:	2 x Parsons turbines, 40,000shp	2 x Parsons turbines, 40,000shp	3 x Parsons turbines, 111,000shp	2 x Allis-Chambers turbines, 16,000shp	4 x General Electric turbines, 120,000shp	4 x Westinghouse turbines, 150,000shp	2 x steam turbines, 25,200shp	4 x Kampon turbines, 152,000shp
Typical air group:	48	48	36	34	42	90	27	53
Armament:	6 x quad QF 2-pdr, 16 x twin 20mm Oerlikon	30 x 40mm Bofors	4 x twin QF 4.5in DP guns, 6 x octuple QF 2-pdr	2 x 5in/38 DP guns, 36 x 40mm Bofors, 20 x 20mm Oerlikon	42 x 40mm Bofors, 8 x twin 20mm Oerlikon	6 x twin 5in/38 DP guns, 72 x 40mm Bofors, 76 x 20mm Oerlikon	4 x twin 127mm Type 89 DP guns OR 6 x 12cm AA guns, 4 x twin 25mm Type 96	6 x twin 127mm Type 89 DP guns, 93 x 25mm Type 96
Armour:	None	None	114mm (belt), 76mm (deck)	None	38mm (hangar)	102mm (belt), 64mm (deck), 38mm (hangar)	None	50mm (belt), 25mm (deck)
Max speed/ range:	25kts/ 12,000nmi	25kts/ 12,000nmi	31kts/ 10,700nmi	19kts/ 10,400nmi	33kts/ 12,000mni	33kts/ 20,000nmi	21kts/ 9,800nmi	32-34kts/ 8,000nmi
Complement:	1,050	1,050	1,230	1,060	1,700	2,500	800	1,600
No. built:	8+2 (16 planned)	5 (6+8 planned)	4 (6 planned)	19 (35 planned)	2	24 (32 planned)	3	3 (16 planned)

India's first aircraft carrier, the Majestic-class *Vikrant* (formerly *Hercules*) on its maiden voyage with the Indian Navy in 1961. The ship had probably the busiest career of her classmates
SMITH ARCHIVE/ALAMY

Chief Petty Officer Brian Northover gives the thumbs up before launching the test sled Chloe from *Melbourne's* catapult in 1974. Chloe and her sibling, Sadie – sometimes said to be named after sailors' ex-girlfriends, but Chloe actually came from a painting hung in the Young & Jackson's Hotel in the carrier's namesake city – were regularly 'pitched and ditched' to test the catapult
GREGORY LEE/FAIRFAX/GETTY

Melbourne's Skyhawks overfly the carrier, 1971
GEORGE LIPMAN/FAIRFAX/GETTY

NAVY
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NAVY
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NAVY
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NAVY
889

CORNERSTONES OF SUPERCARRIER DEVELOPMENT

Several Light Fleets became involved in trials and development work, and the simplicity and ruggedness of their design and construction meant the ships were almost modular, able to easily accept new fittings for testing.

Warrior, between 1948-50, was involved in rubberised deck landing trials, on which adapted Sea Vampires would belly land on skis. The idea was to shift landing apparatus fully onto the ship, lightening the aircraft and boosting its performance. Incredibly, the concept worked, although it was impractical. The tests were flown by legendary Lieutenant-Commander Eric 'Winkle' Brown and involved him landing onto a steel-framed, air-filled and lubricated rubber surface.

To even consider landing jets onto a rubber deck, meant someone had landed them on a conventional flight deck. This was also Winkle Brown, who on December 3, 1945, landed a Sea Vampire onto *Ocean* and started a new age of naval aviation. It came just a month or two after *Ocean* brought the previous era to an end, having recovered a Swordfish aboard for the last time. Meanwhile, *Triumph* first tested the angled flight deck – a painted design at this stage – which was later adopted as a standard design fixture. *Vengeance* served on important cold weather trials in the Arctic circle, and *Perseus* received an experimental BXS-1 steam catapult with which she completed some 1,600 test launches – including a period based in Philadelphia in 1952 where she demonstrated the technology to the US Navy, carrying out hundreds of deadload launches and 127 with manned aircraft.

The various equipment and fixtures trialled on the Light Fleets was vital to the operation of larger, heavier, more capable aircraft and they pioneered the developments critical to the design of the supercarriers that dominant the seas today. In later life, Sir Stanley Goodall looked at the US Navy's Nimitz-class supercarriers with some satisfaction, noting that the starboard-side island, hurricane bow, enclosed hangar, steam catapult, angled flight deck, armoured flight deck, visual landing aids and even the computerised operations room all had their design origins in the Royal Navy. However, arrester gear, and the electromagnetic catapults fitted in the new Ford-class, are American in origin.

> *"Sydney flew sorties in Korea, becoming the first Commonwealth fleet carrier to launch strike operations"*

she had an active part in the 1971 conflict, her Sea Hawks attacking Chittagong and Cox's Bazar, sinking or damaging Pakistani shipping. Further strikes targeted Khulna, Mongla seaport and barracks in Chittagong.

In the 1980s, the ship received two refits, one of which installed a ski jump, enabling her to operate Sea Harrier VSTOL fighters more effectively. *Vikrant* completed her last voyage in 1994 and was laid up in 1997. She was sold for scrapping in 2014, as the last Light Fleet to go to the breakers, ending an era. While eclipsed by subsequent designs, the value provided by the Light Fleets was tremendous. The ships had an incredible innings considering each was laid down in World War Two and expected to sail for just three years. Moreover, with five Majestics and four Colossus ships sold on, they remain the most widely operated classes of fleet carrier ever built. BW

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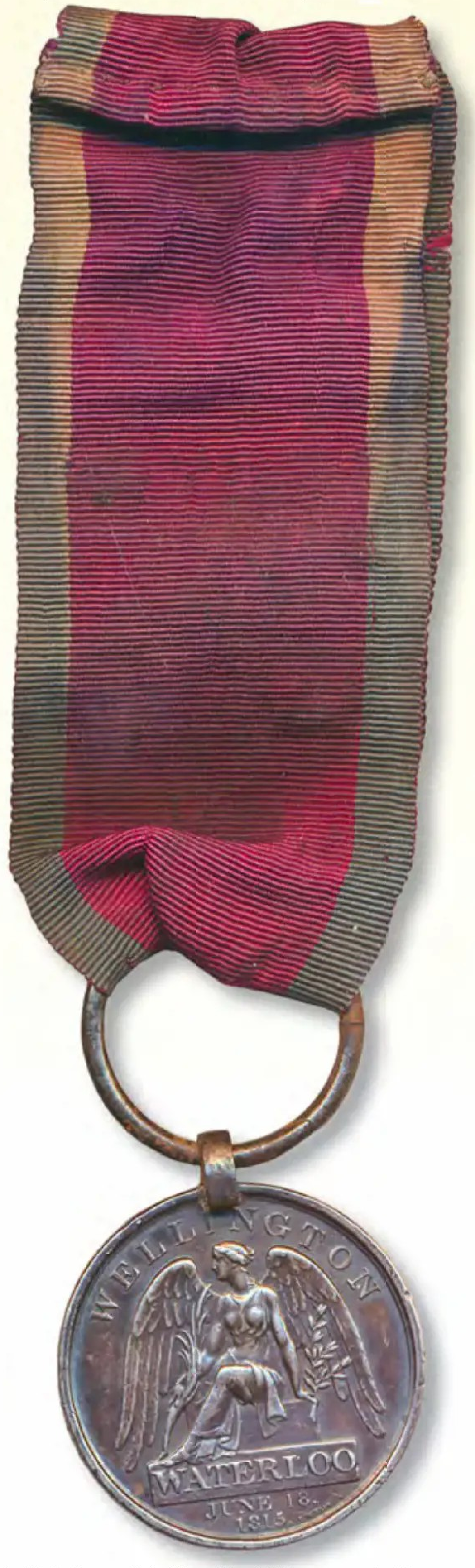
MILITARIA MATTERS

Duncan Evans, your guide to must-have collectables from dealers and auction houses, goes on the hunt for militaria from one of the most famous battles of all time

If you ask AI what the most famous battle of all time is, it suggests the Battle of Hastings – which is why you should always question what AI tells you. Important, yes, most famous, hardly. No, for sheer fame you need to have a battle that was immortalised by a Swedish supergroup at a European singing competition. The answer is, of course, Waterloo.


The Waterloo medal with original fixtures awarded to Coldstream Guardsman Thomas Surrey
WARWICK AND WARWICK

There are others that were bigger, longer and bloodier (battles, not songs!), but Waterloo ended the Napoleonic Wars and sent the emperor into exile. It was a pivotal moment in European history, and this year saw the 210th anniversary of the battle – *BAW*'s last issue paid homage to the significance of this iconic action.

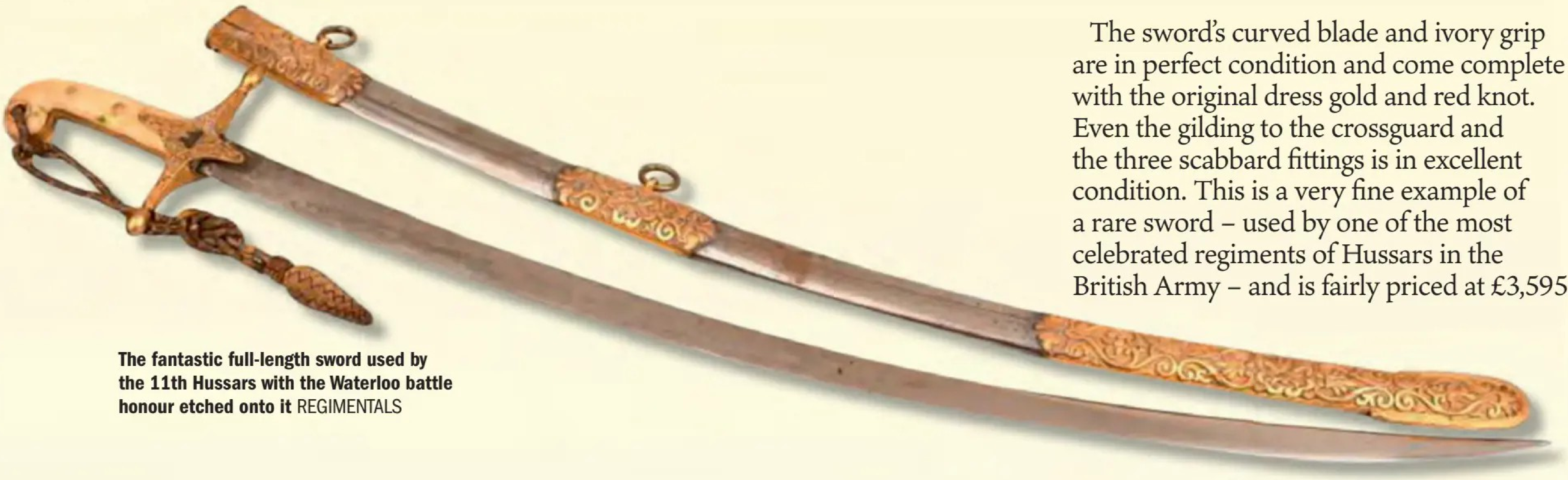
The interesting fact for collectors is that the Waterloo Medal was the first British campaign award to be issued to all ranks who took part, even those in the reserve forces. It wasn't the only one though, as the other contingents that made up the Anglo-Allied force also issued medals to their troops. So, there is a Brunswick Medal for Waterloo, Hanoverian Medal for Waterloo, Nassau Medal for Waterloo and Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg Medal.

Let's take a look at the British medal, with 39,000 examples issued. It was also issued to those who fought at actions immediately preceding Waterloo, such as Quatre Bras. Warwick and Warwick (warwickandwarwick.com) has an upcoming auction with a medal to Thomas Surrey of the Coldstream Guards, described as having minor edge contact marks and in good-fine condition, complete with suspension ring and ribbon – it's worth noting that these are original fixtures. The medal also comes with a copy of the Waterloo Medal roll, this being entry 760 on the list.

The medal is silver, 37mm in diameter, and has a 38mm ribbon of coloured crimson with dark blue edges. It has the profile of the Prince Regent on the obverse and a seated winged Victory figure with 'WELLINGTON' above and 'WATERLOO' below on the reverse. Below this is the date: JUNE 18 1815.

Waterloo medal values depend on the regiment and where it fought, with those in the thick of the action and taking the highest losses commanding the highest prices. Colville's 4th Division (in reserve at Halle so didn't take part in the fighting) and the King's German Legion, are cheapest at £1,500-£2,000. At the top end are the Scots Greys, which can command up to £10,000. The Coldstream Guards – which served as part of the 2nd Guards Brigade in the

A remarkably good condition M1849 helmet offered by a European dealer RATISBON'S


The fantastic full-length sword used by the 11th Hussars with the Waterloo battle honour etched onto it REGIMENTALS

The sword's curved blade and ivory grip are in perfect condition and come complete with the original dress gold and red knot. Even the gilding to the crossguard and the three scabbard fittings is in excellent condition. This is a very fine example of a rare sword – used by one of the most celebrated regiments of Hussars in the British Army – and is fairly priced at £3,595.

defence of Hougoumont – typically fetch more than £2,000. The estimate from the auctioneer for the Surrey medal is £1,300, which may well be on the low side.

Cold steel

Aside from medals, other items from Waterloo do come up for sale, usually from private collections that are being dispersed. Over at European dealer, Ratisbon's (ratisbons.com) there's a Hanoverian Helmet M1849 that commemorates their efforts at Waterloo and in the Peninsular War preceding it.

A tall leather helmet with silver-coloured fittings and spike, and only minor wear and tear, there's a detachable ball-shaped peak on a cross-shaped plate with boss screws. In the middle sits a large horse emblem with 'PENINSULAR-WATERLOO' motif underneath. There are striking curved chin straps, on rosettes, with Phillips-head style screws. Inside is a leather lining, typical for enlisted ranks, making this helmet one for NCOs. The starting price for the bidding is £847 (Buyer's Premium is 24.5%) as this is in the 65th Contemporary History Auction, that will run on July 5-6.

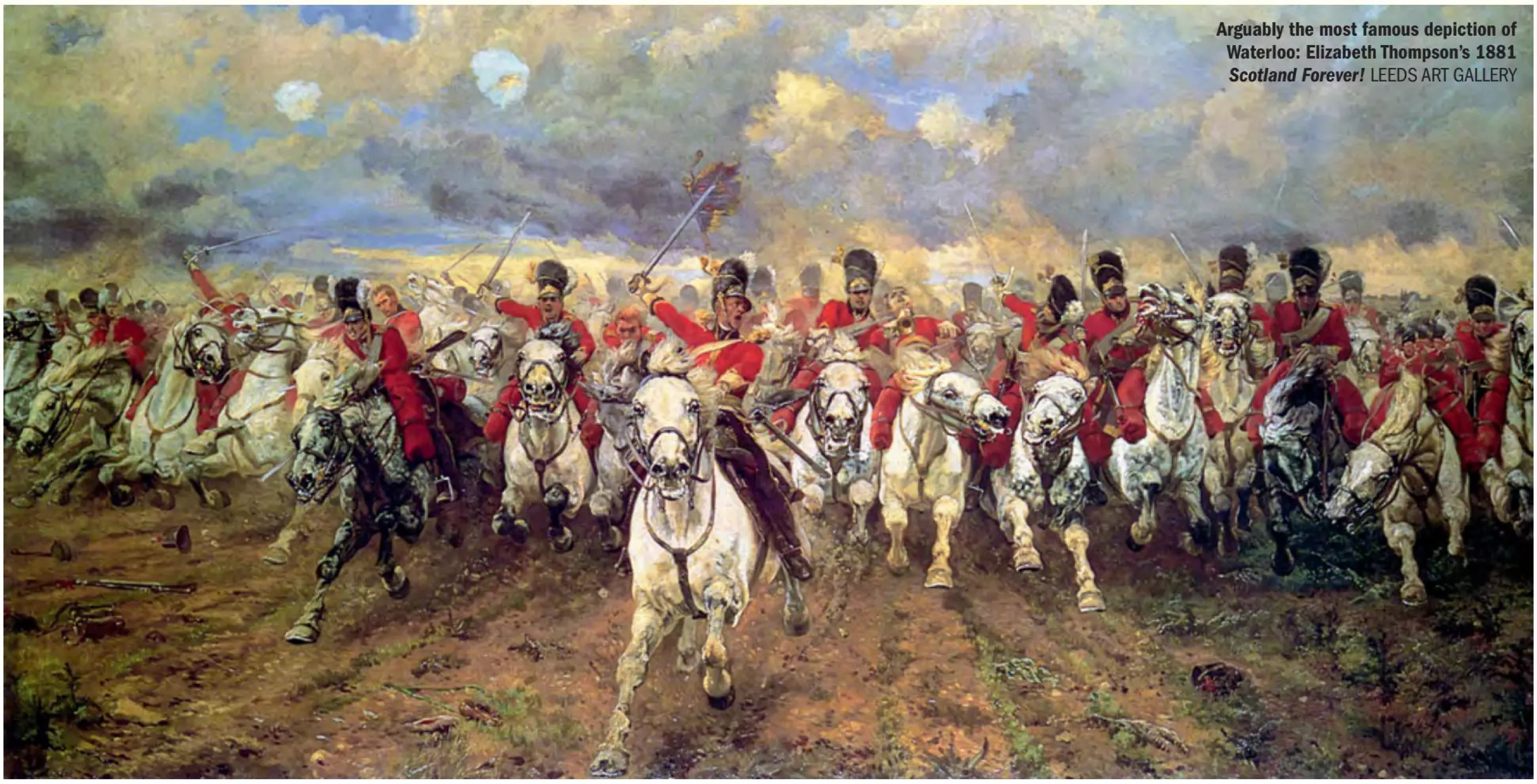
If you want something truly impressive, take a look at this regimental officer's sword from the 11th Hussars, available from Regimentals (regimentals.co.uk). The full-length blade has high-quality etched decoration with panels featuring the Fleur-de-lys Victorian Crown, the etched lettering 'Prince Albert's Own Hussars' and the badge of the Sphinx with 'Egypt' underneath. It lists the impressive battle honours of Salamanca, the Peninsular War, Waterloo and Bhurtpore, and on the reverse is the name of the maker, 'Andrews No.9 Pall Mall.'

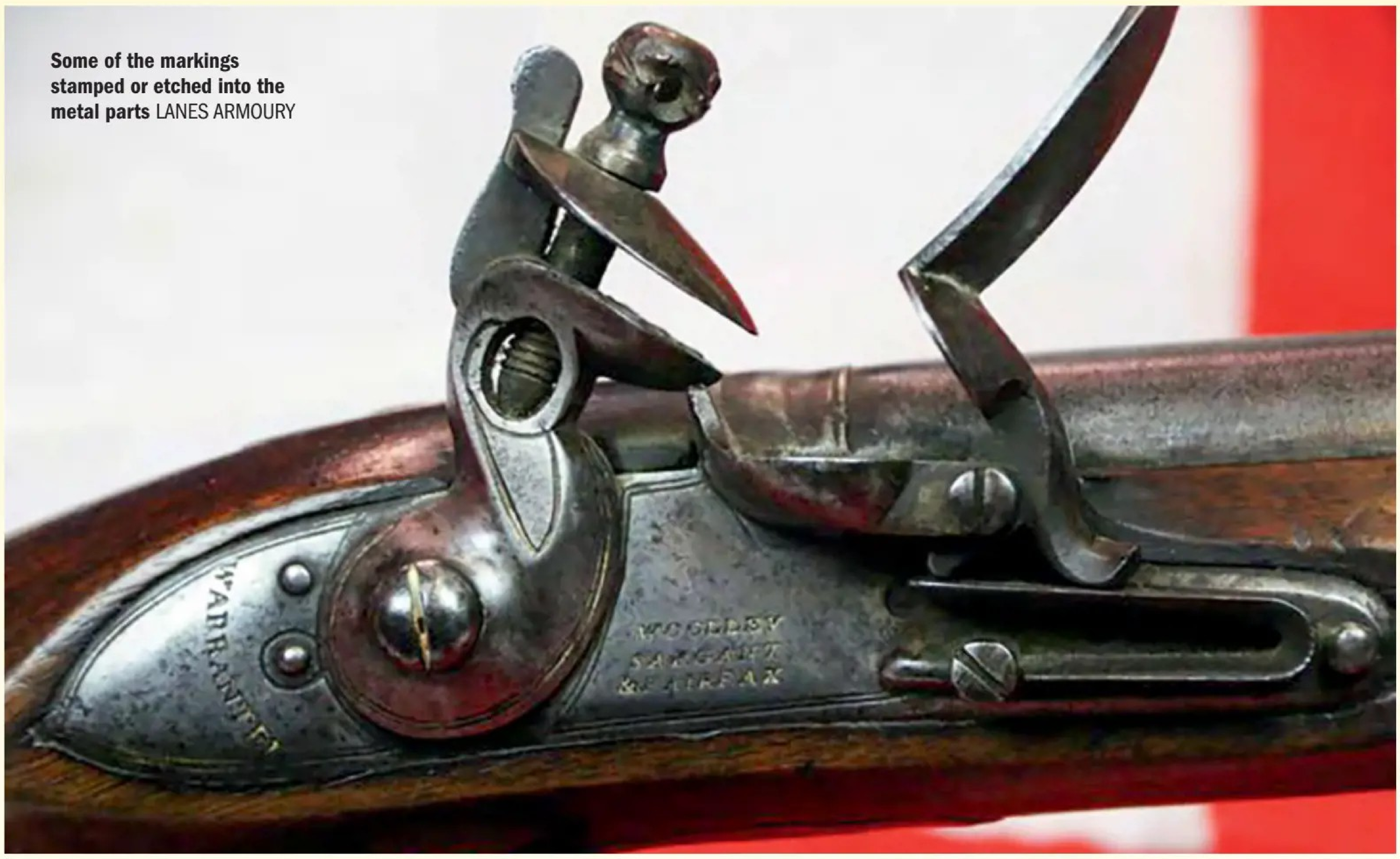
> ***"The interesting fact for collectors is that the Waterloo Medal was the first British campaign medal to be issued to all ranks who took part"***

For something with more firepower, head over The Lanes Armoury (thelanesarmoury.co.uk) as there are a number of pistols up for grabs, as well as more modestly priced items such as recovered roof tiles and musket balls from the battlefield.

Let's take a look at a King George III flintlock pistol: this was the New Land Pattern pistol, used by British Light Dragoon and Hussars regiments (from around 1802) during the Peninsular War and the Hundred Days. The New Land Cavalry Pistol was the basic pistol design for all of Britain's light cavalry and horse artillery and featured the new development of having an all-steel ramrod, making it easier and quicker to load the pistol on horseback. This example is in museum-grade condition and consequently will set you back £2,135.

One of the other pistols available is a 1796 British Heavy Dragoon flintlock pistol, made by Harvey Walklate Mortimer, gunmaker to King George III, of London's Fleet Street. This pistol spent time in a museum founded by veterans of the battle itself! Cost is a hefty £2,995. By the way,


Arguably the most famous depiction of Waterloo: Elizabeth Thompson's 1881 *Scotland Forever!* LEEDS ART GALLERY

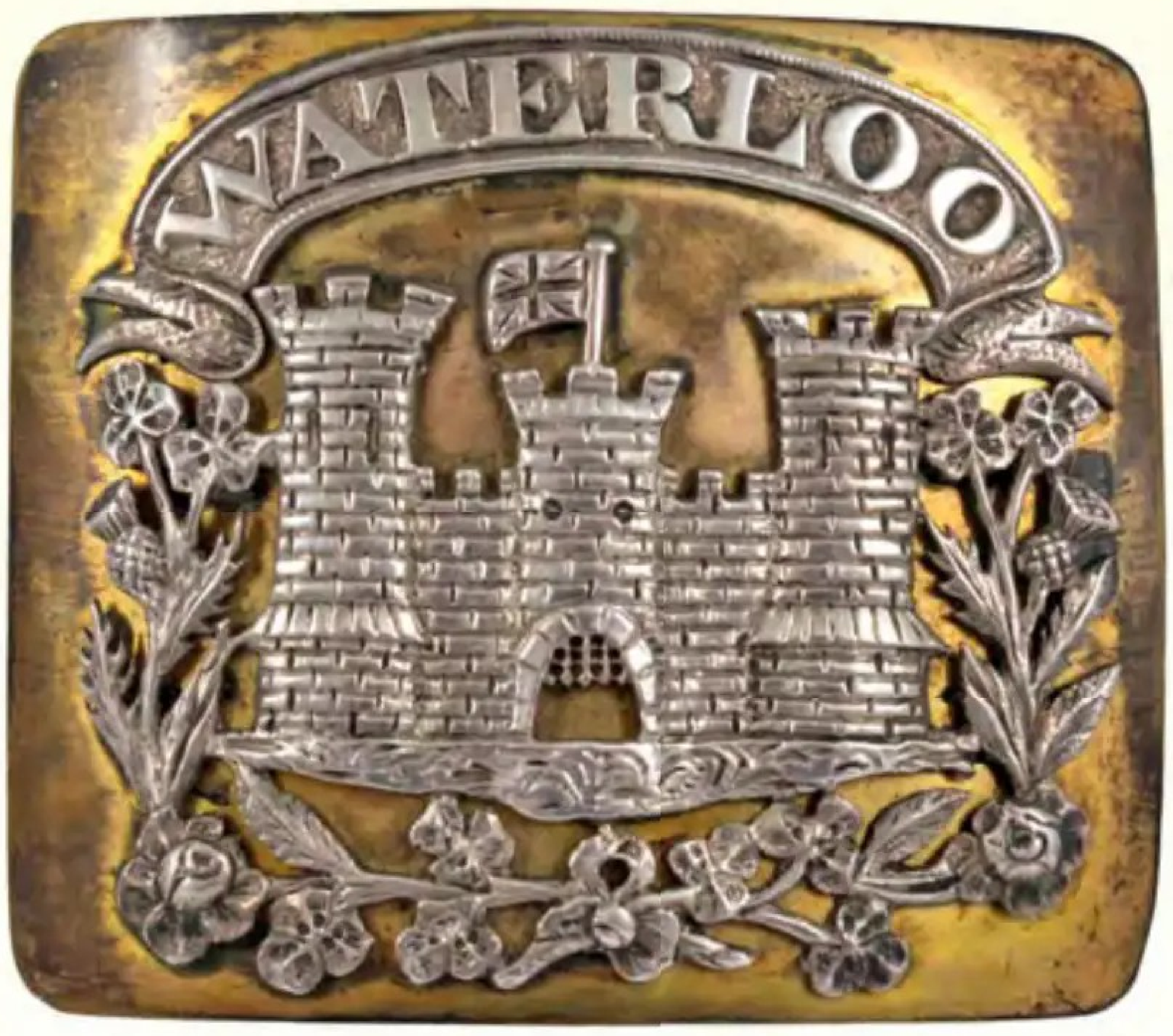


Some of the markings stamped or etched into the metal parts LANES ARMOURY

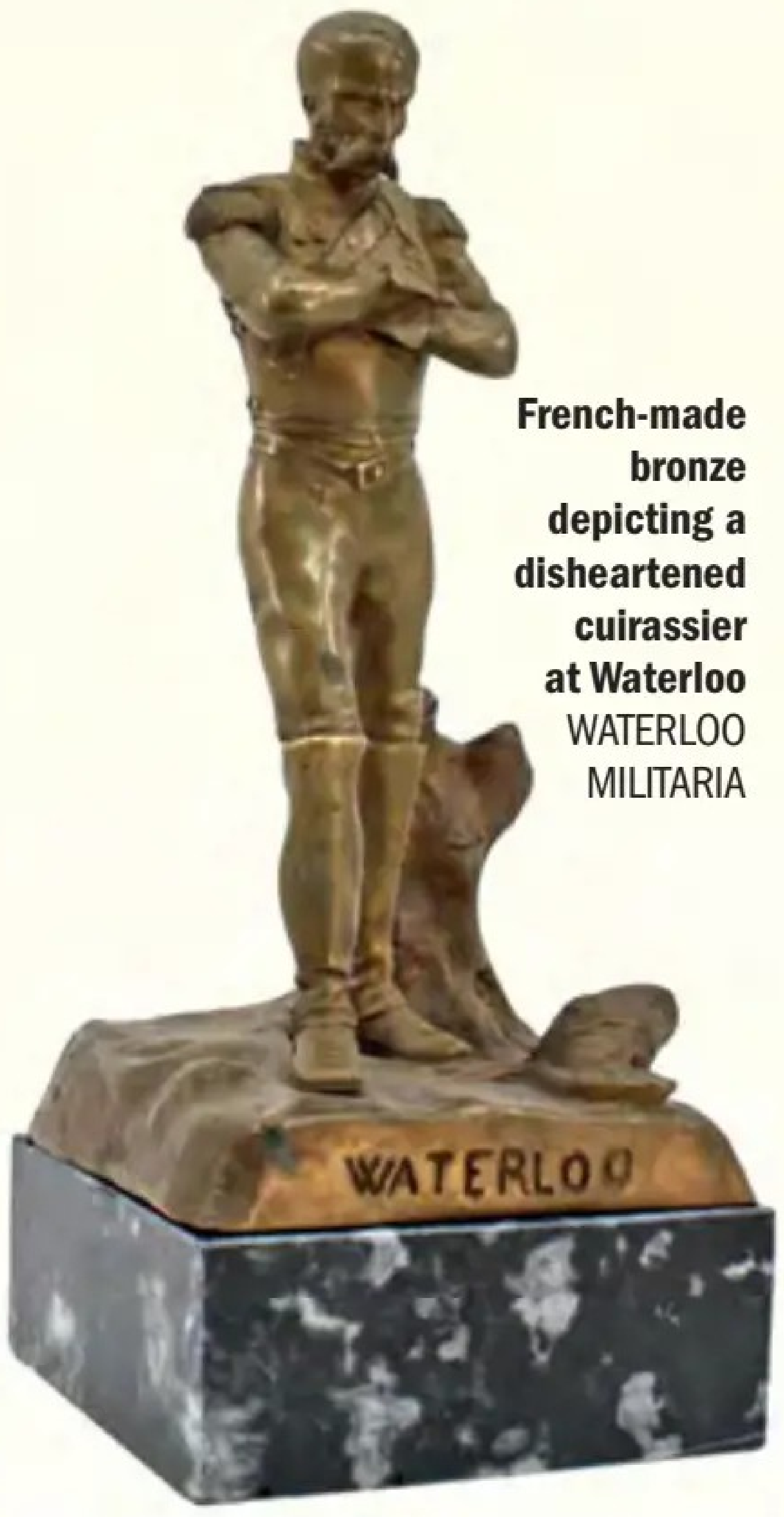
the musket ball and flint from Lanes Armoury are £48, while the roof tile from the battlefield farmhouse is £295.

Not from the battle itself, but to commemorate it, the appropriately named Waterloo Militaria (waterloomilitaria.com) has an officer's belt plate from the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons. This unit was part of the decisive heavy cavalry charge by the Union Brigade. The back plate is rectangular with ornate silver mount, displaying 'Waterloo' above Inniskilling Castle. It's a rare plate, with some slight rubbing to the gilding, dated 1816-1840. Available for £300.

Waterloo Militaria also has another piece of memorabilia commemorating the battle, a French-made, bronze figure depicting a sad-looking cuirassier officer on the field of Waterloo. The figure has arms crossed and stands on ground containing the word 'Waterloo.' It's signed with 'E Bureau 1861' on the side and back. The bronze measures around 24cm high, on a 10cm x 10cm black, quartz base. This will cost you £420.



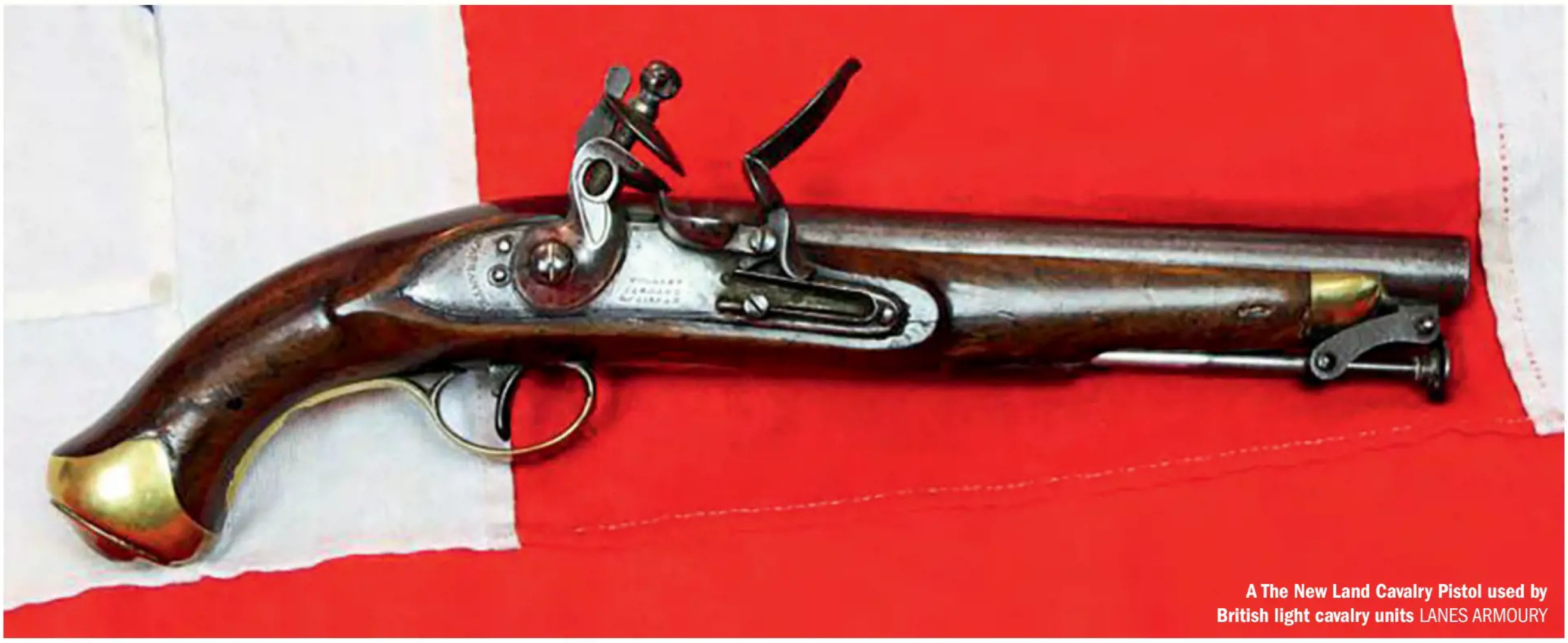
The commemorative belt plate from the 6th Inniskilling WATERLOO MILITARIA



French-made bronze depicting a disheartened cuirassier at Waterloo WATERLOO MILITARIA

SAGE ADVICE

"Sometimes old iron can be more desirable than precious metals: many recipients of the British Waterloo Medal replaced the original iron clip and split suspension ring with silver mounts as the iron tended to rust and mark uniforms."



A The New Land Cavalry Pistol used by British light cavalry units LANES ARMOURY

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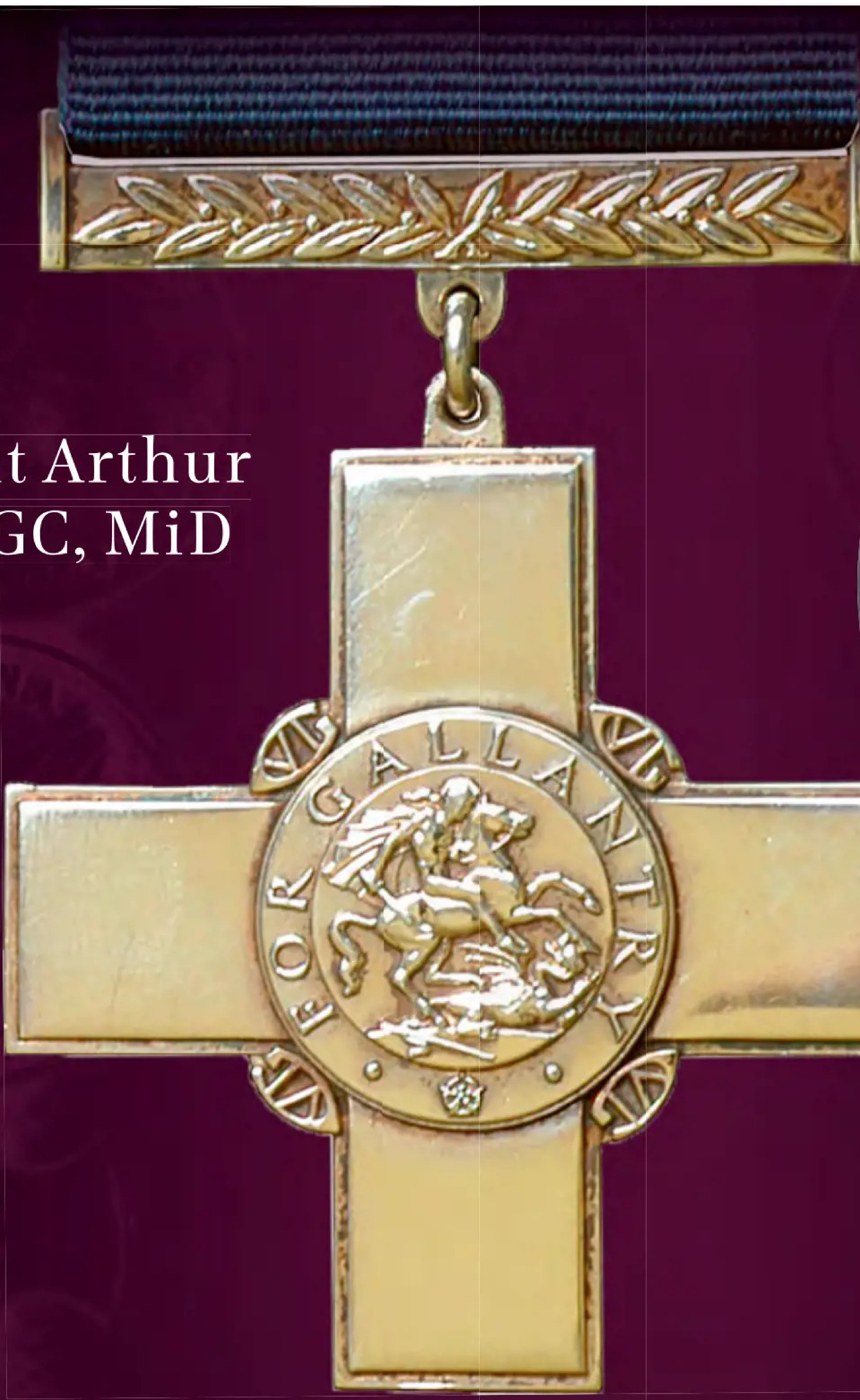
Sergeant Arthur Banks GC, MiD



Sergeant Arthur Banks GC withheld potentially sensitive information while enduring extreme torture
VIA ANDREW THOMAS

HERO *of the* MONTH

by Lord Ashcroft

Banks joined 112 Squadron, which in North Africa flew P-40 Kittyhawks adorned with the unit's distinctive shark mouth insignia. From 1944, it operated Mustang Mk.III/IVs OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

Sergeant Arthur Banks was a hugely courageous airman who, after being shot down and eventually captured by the enemy, was subjected to the most appalling torture before being murdered in cold blood. As a result of his inhumane treatment and after the full story of his brutal death emerged, he was eventually awarded the George Cross – Britain and the Commonwealth's most prestigious gallantry award for courage that is not in the presence of the enemy. I recently took the opportunity to visit Banks' grave in northern Italy to pay my respects to this brave young man just over 80 years after his death.

Arthur Banks was born in Llanddulas, Abergele, Denbighshire, Wales, on October 6, 1923. He was the son of Captain Charles Banks and his wife Harriet (née Phibbs). His father had served in the Royal Flying Corps, the forerunner to the RAF, during World War One when he had become a fighter ace with 43 Squadron, destroying at least six enemy aircraft and being decorated for his bravery – his first victory, on January 28, 1918, was a Gotha bomber that he shot down while flying with 44 Squadron.

Some reports say he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, others indicate it was the Military Cross. Sadly, Arthur Banks' mother, who was originally from Cheltenham, died when he was just six. Charles Banks then married his late wife's sister, Charlotte, and the couple went on to have a daughter, Margaret, who had been the second name of Arthur's mother.

"Banks flew as far south as possible, hoping to land in an Allied-controlled part of Italy, but was unable to make it that far in his damaged aircraft. He was forced to make a crash landing behind enemy lines"

Charles ran a school at Arnold House in Llanddulas, which had previously been operated by his father. The novelist Evelyn Waugh studied for a time at Arnold House when he was a schoolboy. Arthur, too, was educated there before attending St Edward's School, Oxford, where he became head boy of Apsley House.

Behind enemy lines

When World War Two broke out in early September 1939, Banks was only 15 years old and still at school. At Arnold House, Banks was nicknamed 'Sausages', or 'Sausages Banks', because of his penchant for eating them at every opportunity even during rationing. This was partly possible because his great friend at school, Edward Walker, lived on a farm and his parents seemed to conjure up sausages for their son and his best friend.

However, in June 1942, and by this time 18, Banks enlisted into the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. Over the next year, he underwent training as an aircrafthand/pilot/observer in London, Shropshire and Cornwall before, in May 1943, he was sent to South Africa for further training as a fighter pilot. In due course, he served with 112 'Shark' Squadron, Desert Air Force, in North Africa in 1944 before being transferred with that unit to Italy. The first Allied landings on mainland Italy had taken place in early September 1943.

Even after Italy changed sides in the war later the same month, it then took the Allies many months gradually to push the Germans back towards the north of the country. After the loss of central Italy, the Germans had withdrawn to the Gothic – or Green – Line. In the east, this reached the Adriatic coast at Pesaro. On August 25, 1944, the British Eighth Army launched an attack on the eastern section of this defensive line, but they encountered fierce German resistance.

Banks, by this point promoted to the rank of sergeant, and his fellow pilots were flying P-51 Mustang fighter-bombers in direct support of army operations. On August 29, he took part in an attack on the Ravenna and Ferrara areas. During his sortie, his aircraft – Mustang Mk.III serial HB936 – was damaged by German anti-aircraft fire, but he was able to radio that he had been hit. He flew as far south as possible, hoping to land in an Allied-controlled part of Italy, but was unable to make it that far in his damaged aircraft. Eventually, he was forced to make a crash landing behind enemy lines near Rovigo. A fellow airman watching from the skies saw him land safely.

His aircraft had been destroyed, and Banks resolved to reach Allied lines on foot. However, after he made contact with a group of Italian partisans, he decided to help them fight the Germans. It was not long before he was regarded by the partisans as a heroic figure for the advice, encouragement and knowledge he was able to impart.

A truth so revolting

The lengthy citation for Banks' eventual award of the George Cross takes up the story: "Early in December 1944, an attempt at crossing into allied territory by boat was planned. Sergeant Banks and a number of partisans assembled at the allotted place, but the whole party was surrounded and captured.

"Banks was handed over to the German commander of the district, who presided at his interrogation. During the questioning, Banks was cruelly tortured. At one stage, he succeeded in getting hold of a light machine gun, with which he might have killed most of his captors, had not one of the partisans – fearing more severe torture – intervened and pinned his arms to his sides. Sergeant Banks was badly knocked about before he was taken to another prison.

Bomb-armed Mustangs of 112 Squadron before taking off from their Italian airstrip. Note the PSP matting
OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

"On December 8, 1944, Sergeant Banks was taken, with a number of partisans, to a prison at Adria. He remained there until December 19, when he was handed over to the commander of a detachment of the 'Black Brigade' [Brigate Nere, an Italian fascist paramilitary group, also known as the 'Black Shirts']. He was then transferred to another prison at Ariano Polesine. Here, in the presence of Italian fascists, he was stripped of his clothing and again tortured. Banks was eventually bound and thrown into the River Po. Despite his wounds, even at this stage, he succeeded in reaching the riverbank. The fascists then took him back to the prison, where he was shot through the head.

The citation continued: "At the time of his capture, Sergeant Banks was endeavouring to return to allied lines, so that he might arrange for further supplies to the partisans. He endured much suffering with stoicism, withholding information which would have been of vital interest to the enemy. His courage and endurance were such that they impressed even his captors. Banks' conduct was, at all times, in keeping with the highest traditions of the service, even in the face of most brutal and inhuman treatment."

> *"The court heard that the facts of the case are 'in truth so revolting as to make the task a most unpleasant and unsavoury one'"*

Arthur Banks had died on December 20, 1944, at Ariano nel Polesine, Italy, aged just 21. His George Cross – the only 'tier one' award bestowed on an airman in the Italian campaign – was announced on November 5, 1946, more than a year after the end of World War Two. His sister received his posthumous GC from King George VI in an investiture at Buckingham Palace on December 3, 1946.

Banks' grave can be found in the Argenta Gap War Cemetery
LORD ASHCROFT MEDAL COLLECTION

Later, more details emerged about Banks' horrific treatment. In August 1946, the trial began in Naples of ten Italians, including two women, relating to Banks' death. Two Germans were also accused of complicity. The cout heard that the facts of the case are "in truth so revolting as to make the task a most unpleasant and unsavoury one".

After refusing to betray those who had assisted him, Banks was repeatedly struck, kicked and subsequently whipped, being hung up by his wrists, which were bound with thin wire that cut deeply into his flesh while he was again lashed with a whip. Banks was then burned with red hot irons, but still refused to provide any valuable information. Next, his German captors then handed him over to fascist security officers. A Lieutenant Rinaldi renewed the flogging and torture with irons. Then two women tortured him further in what was described as an "unspeakable fashion".

Next, they threw Banks on his back, poured petrol on his chest and set light to him. Finally, they dragged the badly injured airman to a bridge over the River

The Mustang flown by Banks on the day he was shot down VIA ANDREW THOMAS

Po, tied a large stone to his feet and dropped him into the river. In a final effort, Banks miraculously managed to free himself and struggled to the bank, but he was seen by his two women torturers. Having then been dragged back to prison, Rinaldi then shot him through the back of the head with a pistol. Banks' body was discarded, apparently on a dung heap.

A courageous Englishman

In all, 32 people came under investigation from the Italian and British authorities who were determined that this vile war crime should not go unpunished. After a hearing lasting a month, Banks' main torturers, Anna Paola Cattanio and Olimpio Ferracini, were found guilty and sent to prison for 20 years. Three others were also convicted of involvement in his torture, and they received shorter prison sentences of between five and eight years. Six others were acquitted.

Shortly after the end of the war, Banks' remains were reinterred at the Argenta Gap War Cemetery in northern Italy and it was here I paid my respects to him earlier this year. His grave is inscribed: 'The righteous are in the hands of God and there shall no torment touch them.'

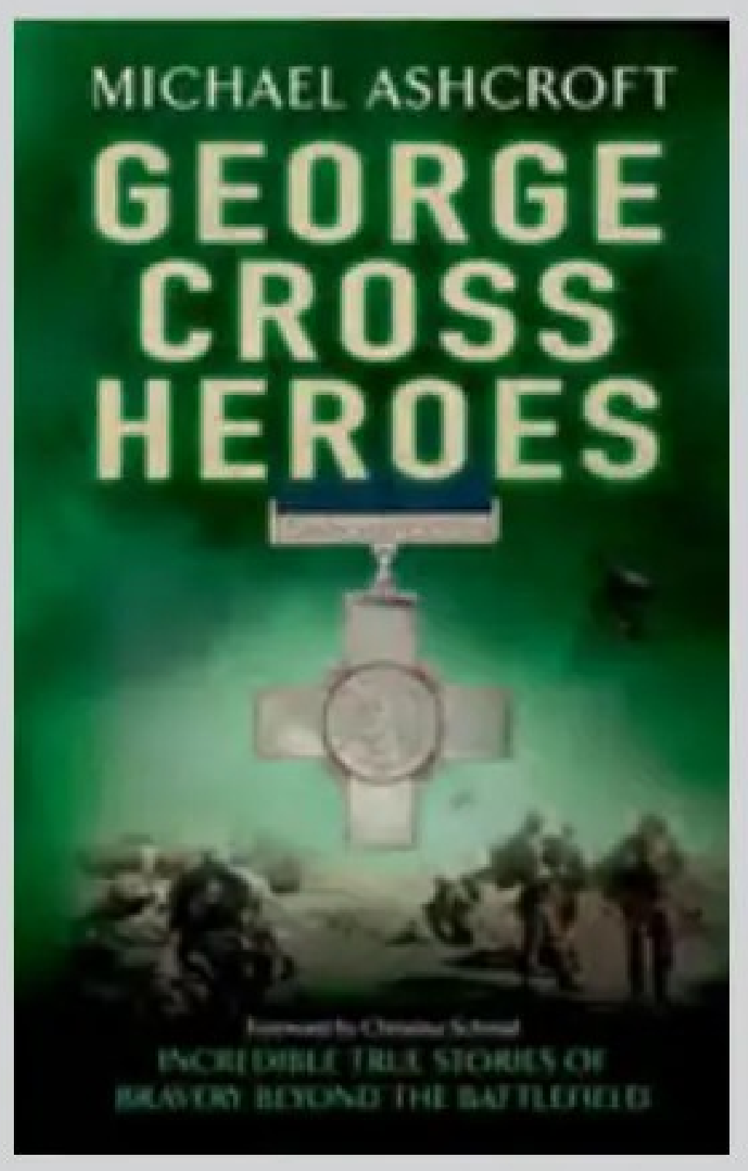
I discovered that at this immaculately kept Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery, Banks is in very good company. Also buried there is Corporal Thomas Hunter VC, who died aged 21 in a diversionary raid on nearby Lake Comacchio. Hunter, a Royal Marine, was awarded a posthumous VC, the only one to the Royal Marines during World War Two. In an incredible act of self-sacrifice, Hunter, who was in charge of a Bren section, had offered himself as a target to save his troop. The citation for his decoration ended: "Throughout the operation his magnificent courage, leadership and cheerfulness had been an inspiration to his comrades."

The graveyard is also the final resting place of Major Anders Lassen VC, MC & two Bars, who was killed, aged 24, leading another diversionary raid near Lake Comacchio. To this day, Lassen, a Dane, remains the only member of the SAS to have been awarded the VC in the regiment's 84-year history. Lassen's citation ended: "The high sense of devotion to duty and the esteem in which he was held by the men he led, added to his own magnificent courage, enabled Major Lassen to carry out all the tasks he had been given with complete success."

Banks' name is on a headstone at the War Memorial, Llanddulas, where he lived as a boy. Similarly, his name is on a memorial board at St Edward's School Chapel, Oxford. Because of his mother's links to Cheltenham, Banks is also commemorated on Cheltenham Borough War Memorial and on a plaque at St Mark's Parish Church, Cheltenham.

War artist Robert Swan also painted an impressive painting of him. For many years after his death at Ariano nel Polesine, Banks was known simply, with great affection by local Italians as "the Englishman" – a very courageous Englishman for sure. BW

GEORGE CROSS HEROES



Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His book, *George Cross Heroes* was first published in 2012. For more information, visit georgecrossheroes.com. For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit lordashcroft.com. Visit his website about courage: lordashcroftonbravery.com. Follow him on X and Facebook: @LordAshcroft

ROUGH RIDERS
PETER DOYLE
RELUCTANT PARTNER

Military History with Pete and Gary

No.40

Sometimes, when listening to oral history recordings I did as a young lad back in 1986, I can remember the room, I remember the old boy, yet at the same time I marvel at the memories they had of more than 70 years earlier.

Some of the most detailed were the recordings I made with Jack Dorgan, totalling 17 hours – and it wasn't all blood and thunder. In fact, much of it conjured up the essence of daily life. For instance, back in 1915, the newly promoted Jack was serving on the Western Front with the 1/7th Northumberland Fusiliers. By this time, they were used to the set routines of trench warfare. Each day began with the morning 'stand to' in case the Germans should attempt to use the half-light before dawn to launch an attack: "There was no whistle blown, no signals given, but quietly every working party finished, every patrol was brought back into the trench, all of the sentry groups were put on the alert. That was 'stand to'.

"Over the whole of the front-line trenches there was silence. In that hour you just stood there, every man out, bayonets fixed, one round in the breech and an ample supply of ammunition for whatever might occur."

For many in the front line, cold food was the norm. Bully beef was a staple – alongside the standard army biscuit: "Always plenty of biscuits: about 3in square and ½in thick. They were as hard as nails! You had to get a stone and break it down into small pieces. Then you'd soak it with tea. These biscuits were worth having; everybody carried them."

Their uniform proved very suitable for the rigours of trench life, as Jack recalls: "Big strong heavy leather boots, in England they had to be polished when on parade but when overseas they had to be greased. They were tied with strong laces. We wore puttees, long khaki cloth about 3in wide, one for each leg, starting at the boot and wrapping it around up to the knee. Khaki trousers with braces. Two shirts: a body shirt and the khaki shirt. Your tunic stretched from the neck, nearly down to the knee. Two breast pockets with a flap over – buttoned. Two wide side pockets, they could hold your pipe, matches and personal belongings. We had a cloth cap, with a peak in front. The uniform was made of very strong cloth."

During long days in the trenches, many soldiers wrote to their families and sweethearts: "I wrote a field postcard every day to my mother.. On one side you would put the address. On the other side was a printed list: I am well, I am not well; I am in hospital, I am not in hospital! You crossed out 'nots' and so on! I have been wounded, or I have not been wounded. I have received your parcel; I have not received your parcel. I have received your letter; I have not received your letter. You crossed out what didn't apply."

Some men were illiterate and needed help. Jack remembered acting as intermediary for one comrade intent on plighting his troth with a girl back home: "We had a fellow in our company who couldn't write: Private Bacon. He was a big feller, 6ft 1in – real good soldier. I was dishing out the post, I says to him, 'Bill, you're never getting any letters!' He just turned away. Afterwards I said, 'What was the matter?' 'Well, I can't read, and I can't write. I never learnt at school!'

"I took on the job of writing letters. I wrote home to his girlfriend as if it was him writing! The letters he got back he used to bring to me, and I used to read to him. Her father was a publican; he had a pub in Choppington. After the war I often thought of calling in; but I never did."

He remembers so much – and I remember Jack.

Peter Hart and Gary Bain's long running 'Pete and Gary's Military History' weekly podcast is available via podcast services. Follow Pete and Gary on X, formerly known as Twitter: @HartMilitary

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Next Month

August 2025, issue 220

Inside Your Magazine

On sale July 31

Next month features perhaps the biggest of anniversaries: it is 80 years since VJ Day – the end of World War Two – and we mark the significant occasion in a suitably substantial way.

Join us as we dive into the huge effort to quickly get men serving in the Far East home by air, and explore the massive British invasion force poised to reclaim colonial territories in the region – and why it was prepared to fight. We break down the Commonwealth's contributions to the war effort, while noted historian Peter Caddick-Adams follows the situation in a transforming Britain and British military, and discovers why Japan's surrender came as something of a shock.

As always, that is not all. We profile a Victorian wonder weapon, fly with Harriers in Bosnia, and Ingram Murray – former army officer and father of comedian and podcast host Al Murray – speaks to *BAW* about his part in the decade-long effort to identify a fallen World War One officer, a man who turned out to be related to English romantic poet William Wordsworth.

Plus

News, Lord Ashcroft's Hero of the Month, reviews and more

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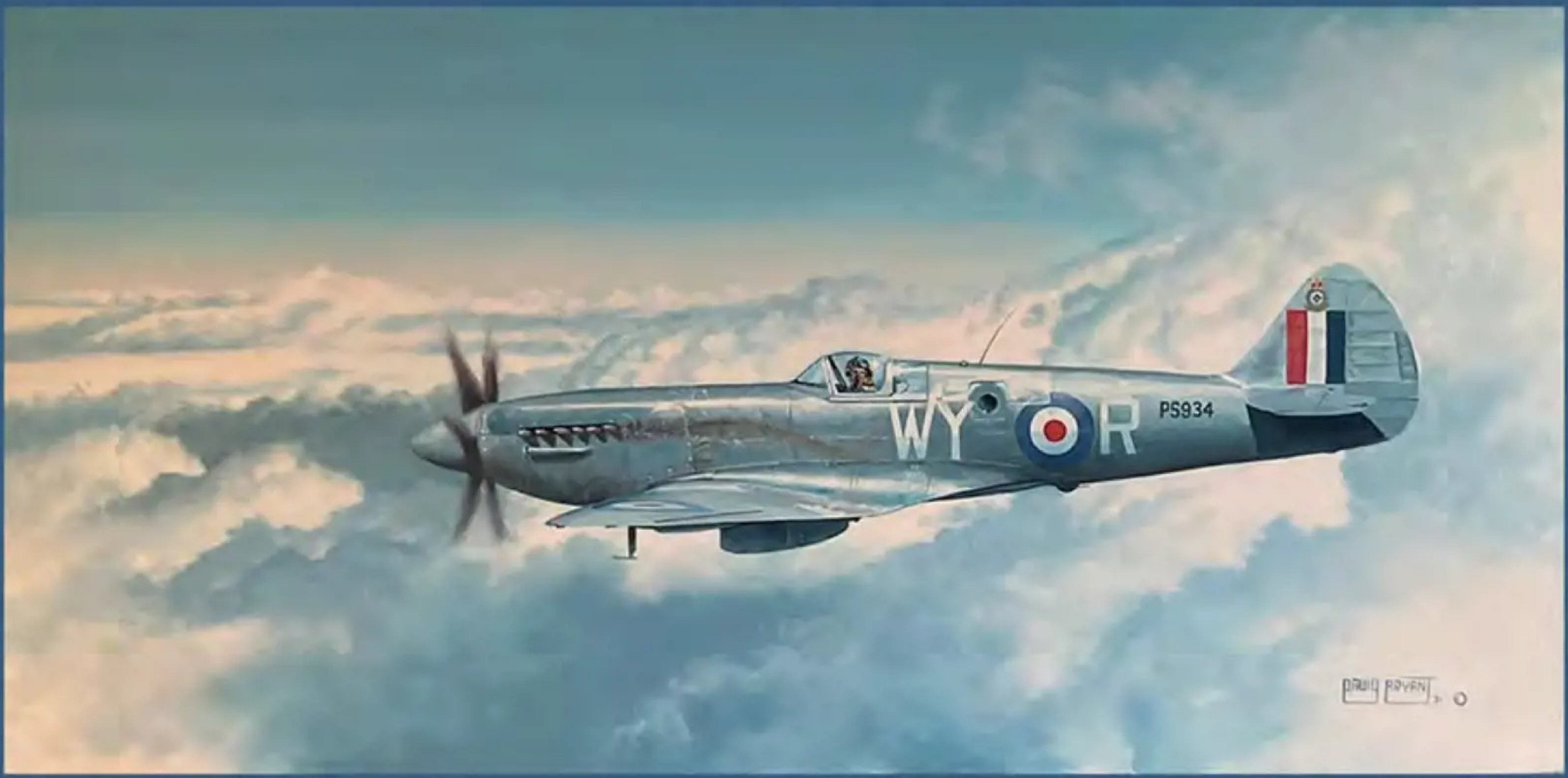

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